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FORGOTTEN EVERYDAYS

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EDITORIAL: FORGOTTEN EVERYDAYS

Elisabetta Di Stefano & Carsten Friberg & Max Rynnänen

When we thought of the theme of forgotten everydays for this issue, the theme we had in mind raised the question: forgotten by whom? The subtitle of the call reveals an answer when it says 'expanding Everyday Aesthetics'. We thought of the discussion tagged Everyday Aesthetics. Everyday Aesthetics as a philosophical trend (born in the USA and spread also in European countries) focuses on Western philosophical tradition, in particular analytic and pragmatist philosophy. We thought it peculiar how examples of the everyday are always from a middle-class point of view of the Global North. Our idea was to ask what happens when we extend this scope to forgotten everydays, i. e. what would appear in different points of view and other geographical areas, or in a historical perspective.

Can this discipline also include other forms of everyday life? Have they been forgotten because no one has taken interest in them, because middle-class examples were just more obvious for the writers, or because they cannot really be discussed as a matter of aesthetics?

Perhaps aesthetics in a broader sense forgets about everyday living but in a perspective of Everyday Aesthetics that explicitly stresses a focus on it, we would try and reach beyond academic and middle class everydays to other forms – to the migrant, the inhabitant in megacities' slum, the farming life at the limit of existence because of climate and/or industrial interests, or at the opposite end for someone who is rich and does not need to work. We did not think that people from these groups would write for our special issue of *Popular Inquiry*, maybe, but we thought that it could be possible to get something that touched upon these everydays and, to be precise, to their non-middle-class worlds – but it should be possible to at least ask questions, open gates, and sketch out what it means to have an everyday, outside of what most academics discuss as normal. We are of course not the first to do this. Ben Highmore writes in the introduction to the *Everyday Life Reader* (2002):

Everyday life is a vague and problematic phrase. Any assumption that it is simply ‘out there’, as a palpable reality to be gathered up and described, should face an immediate question: whose everyday life? Often enough, however, such questions are purposefully ignored. To invoke the everyday can often be a sleight of hand that normalizes and universalizes particular values, specific world-views. Politicians, for instance, are often fond of using terms like ‘everyday life’ or ‘ordinary people’ as a way of hailing constituents to a common culture: people like us, lives like ours. The underside of this, of course, is that this everyday life is haunted by implicit ‘others’, who supposedly live outside the ordinary, the everyday.”¹

With the issues raised by Highmore one can even ask why the everyday should be a topic for aesthetics. In a philosophical perspective, something that is in need of theoretical reflections when it becomes a problem – when questions hitherto answered in our practices no longer find sufficient explanations in our established interpretation. When the knowledge embedded in practice becomes insufficient, we request new and different understandings, and we take a step away from the practice to view it from a distance and to achieve a better understanding. Concerning the everyday, we want to understand its social conflicts, power structures, existential challenges – to name some issues. But is it also in need of aesthetic theory? It becomes important to consider what it is we want to know to which aesthetics can give an answer.

The difficulty about answering such questions is that any approach will frame the analysis and discourse in accordance with the implied assumptions and interpretation. A sufficient answer to what we want to know depends on what we consider to be sufficient which depends on expectations coming from our view on the everyday and on what understanding of aesthetics we have. The significance of the everyday has been excessively discussed in *Everyday Aesthetics*. With a view from outside these discussions, one wonders about the choice of examples of everyday life like commodified design and urban activities rather than, e. g. popular culture that already has been a topic of discussion. A question that appears here is what sort of everyday the *Everyday Aesthetics* wants to discuss. A decade ago, an excessive study demonstrated how behavioral scientists made claims about human psychology drawn from a narrow empirical foundation, what the authors called WEIRD societies, i. e. Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic.² Perhaps researchers in *Everyday Aesthetics* demonstrate a similar bias. This will prove problematic if claims are made about cultural values with a Western middle-class culture as standard. However, it is not always clear if the claims are meant to be applicable in general. How inclusive or limited is it then intended to be? Asking about forgotten everyday life is a way of investigating the potential, limitations, and assumptions made when using *Everyday Aesthetics* in uncommon examples. Does it have a potential for disclosing aspects of the everyday that

would otherwise have remained hidden to us? Are the commonly used examples of everyday a mere coincidence – e. g. when many philosophers choose examples within sight while they are writing, hence a desk, a cup, a chair –, or are they of a kind where forgotten everyday are not forgotten but excluded because Everyday Aesthetics, due to its understanding of aesthetics, have little or nothing to say?

Aesthetic theories are always normative and embedded with ideology. This becomes apparent when asking about the understanding of aesthetics within Everyday Aesthetics. Is the opposition to arts-related aesthetics moving along the same mode of thinking as the one it opposes to then merely applying it on other cultural phenomena, or does it change direction?

What indicates an affirmative answer to the former questions are the frequent references to appreciative practices which depend on a set of values for what is appreciated. At this point, one notices the choice of examples regarding the everyday and art, and one asks oneself if this choice reveals the authors' set of values, those of a Western, middle-class art-lover. Could the examples also be of forgotten everyday? Are they forgotten by chance and could be included, or are they of no interest because they belong to a different sphere?

The question can become more controversial as it could be one of whether the understanding of aesthetics conceals critical aspects of aesthetics – what is prominent in discourses on aesthetics that reflect on what avantgarde artists were intending, until they were taken over by art-institutions and made harmless by them. Does Everyday Aesthetics work on the same premises as these institutions and turn conflicts and problems of the forgotten everyday into something harmless? Or does it provide analysis to understand them and perhaps change them?

One reason why this more controversial question comes up is the lack of interest in popular culture that is very prominent in everyday life since World War II, also as a social and cultural changing force, and in forms of art about the everyday since 19th century, often with more explicit desires for changes than the popular culture, but not as successful.

Since Romanticism, art could appear as a revolutionary opposition to the existing world, inviting us to create alternatives. This form was paralleled, or met, by reactionary forms conserving the norms and ideals of the existing world. One can view art since the 19th century as a battleground between revolution and restoration with opposing intentions of the everyday. Of course, this is not the only interpretation possible, but it clarifies how institutions of art and aesthetic theories become combatant in interpretations. Artworks with revolutionary intentions can be appropriated by theories that see artistic objects rather than means of communication, education or knowledge, and avant-gardes may find themselves appropriated by art-institutions and academic discourses. Regrettably, aesthetic theories about the social and political intentions

of avant-garde art seem to have very little to offer about the everyday because it is viewed through the critical lenses of art that end up stealing the picture.

This brings back the question of the understanding of aesthetics in *Everyday Aesthetics*, whether it follows some arts-related forms of aesthetics or takes a different direction. Is it about finding moments of aesthetic value in the everyday and are these values then appreciative or transformative? Does appreciative also mean affirmative? Or is it an opportunity to change perspective? Is the question about the understanding of aesthetics also revealing another question: who theorizes, i.e. who is in the position to make aesthetic theories and for what interests? Perhaps this helps us answer the problem of the forgotten everyday. *Everyday Aesthetics* questions a specific kind of aesthetic theories that narrowly focus on art, but does it also question the normative assumptions of its own position in aesthetics? Does it answer a need for theoretical reflection and explanation of phenomena of the everyday that enable us to understand these phenomena because it gives an explanatory voice to them? Or is it in danger of appropriating these phenomena just like the institutions of art do with rebellious art, i.e. neutralizing them in light of an evaluating view on the different phenomena? Can forgotten everyday become part of *Everyday Aesthetics*?

We can still see the need to not just discuss a design vase on the table – or a life where there is a lot of pastime, or to write in an article “when we go out in the morning to collect the trash...”, or “when we cross the skies with our private jets, we often...”. But while we are not witnessing this yet, not in our own issue here, we might still say that at least it has raised some questions concerning what can and could be discussed in *Everyday Aesthetics*.

As an autonomous part of the everyday issue, we publish the special issue *Cars*, edited by Scott Elliott - focusing on artistic research.

¹ Ben Highmore, “Introduction: Questioning everyday life,” in *The Everyday Life Reader*, edited by Ben Highmore (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

² Joseph Henrich, Stephen J. Heine, Ara Norenzayan, “The weirdest people in the world”, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 2010, 33:2/3: 1-75. doi:10.1017/S0140525X0999152X

CULTURAL TOURISM: AUTHENTICITY, ENGAGEMENT AND THE EVERYDAY

Lisa Giombini & Marta Benenti

Abstract

As renown, one main aim of everyday aesthetics is to widen the scope of traditional Western aesthetics beyond the realms of fine arts and nature, so as to uncover the aesthetic potential of the varied phenomena that constitute people's daily life. Tourism and traveling, however, have so far received comparatively little theoretical treatment in the everyday aesthetics literature. This paper attempts to make up for this lack by presenting tourism as a proper object of aesthetic research. Unearthing the aesthetic motivations that animate so-called cultural tourism, it shows that, while searching for 'authenticity' in the visited destination tourists remain trapped in their own, detached, 'tourist gaze'. In order to reconcile this contradiction, we appeal to the theoretical tools provided by everyday aesthetics. After discussing and discarding approaches based on defamiliarization and distancing, we exploit strategies that rely on the adoption of an engaged aesthetic attitude. We conclude by suggesting that the engagement paradigm turns the tourist gaze into a mindful and embodied relation to the visited environment or cultural habit, thereby offering the visitor a chance to appreciate the place's quotidian life while at the same time ensuring aesthetic fulfillment.

Keywords

Everyday Aesthetics; Cultural Tourism; Tourist gaze; Authenticity; Aesthetic Appreciation.

1. Introduction¹

Tourism is an ever-increasing phenomenon in the globalized world. Although it is undeniable that people travel for several different purposes and in very different ways, many tourist activities are closely related to both artistic and non-artistic aesthetic practices - think for example of the importance of cultural and natural heritage in choosing a travel destination, the interest of visitors in the aesthetics of the visited cities, and the growing importance of culinary tourism. However, while sociologists have been investigating tourist practices since at least the Sixties,² tourism has obtained so far only relatively scant attention on the part of philosophers of art and aestheticians, with few relevant exceptions.³ As a matter of fact, a systematic discussion on the subject in philosophical aesthetics is still lacking. This neglect is particularly surprising if one shifts the focus to the domain of everyday aesthetics. As renown, one main aim of everyday aesthetics is to widen the unduly limited scope of traditional Western aesthetics beyond the realms of fine arts and nature, so as to take into account the variety of phenomena that constitute people's daily life, meant as a complex sum of objects, events and practices. With this aim, scholars in the field have investigated an astonishing number of activities. Some examples include laundry, cooking and commuting; weather; fashion and clothing, design; vacuum cleaning; gardening, landscaping, architecture,

and design.⁴ With the relevant exception of Katya Mandoki,⁵ who included tourism among the “matrixes” that make up everyday reality, tourism, has received comparatively little theoretical treatment in the debate.⁶

Marrying insights from tourism studies with everyday aesthetics, in this paper we will focus on a specific type of tourism, so-called cultural tourism, understood as an aesthetic practice dealing primarily with the aesthetic appreciation of the visited places’ everyday life. The overall aim of this analysis is to show that tourism and travelling more generally can constitute a proper object of investigation for aesthetics. Everyday aesthetics, in particular, will prove to be a valuable means by which we can reassess our tourist practices.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we introduce cultural tourism as a controversial social practice and identify its two main aesthetic drives, namely the search for aesthetic pleasure and a quest for the authenticity of the toured place in its everyday aspects. In section 3, we suggest that these two aesthetic drives are mutually in conflict. While looking forward to experiencing firsthand the authentic daily life of the visited destinations, tourists are confined by their own tourist gaze to the role of detached aesthetic spectators. In sections 4 and 5, we discuss two alternative ways in which the aesthetic appreciation of the ordinary is assessed by scholars in everyday aesthetics and apply them to the case of cultural tourism. We contend that, unlike strategies based on aesthetic distancing, the adoption of an engaged aesthetic attitude may turn the tourist gaze into an embodied and mindful relationship to the visited environment, thereby offering the visitor a chance to appreciate the place’s quotidian life in a way that is ideally akin to that of the locals.

2. Cultural Tourism as an Aesthetic Practice

Tourism is a widespread and well-established phenomenon embracing a number of distinct cultural activities, social relations, and economic interests. In 2018, before the Covid19 pandemic brutally curtailed displacements, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals, accompanied by USD 1.7 trillion of export earnings generated by tourism.⁷ Based on what tourists gaze upon, it is possible to distinguish various categories of tourism.⁸ For example, when tourists are primarily motivated by an intent to see art in a place other than one’s usual residence, scholars talk about ‘art tourism’.⁹ Instead, touristic activities aimed at experiencing ordinary aspects of social life in unusual contexts are generally referred to as ‘cultural tourism’.¹⁰

Emerged during the Nineties as a significant portion of global tourism, cultural tourism had already been identified in the late 1970s and early 1980s by researchers and tourism managers as being specifically oriented towards the understanding of the destination’s culture.

According to the UNWTO, cultural tourism is defined precisely by tourists' essential motivation to "learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination". Such attractions or products consist not only of the "arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries" but also of "the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions,"¹¹ as they unfold in the daily routine of human environments other than one's own.

An umbrella term, cultural tourism includes all forms of leisure travelling aimed at discovering different cultures, as for instance attending traditional craftsmanship such as cigar making in Cuba, hand waving in the Philippines, or miniature painting in Iran. Other prominent instances of cultural tourism are the numerous guided tours that allow visitors to spend some time in rural areas, apparently isolated from urban, more developed centers such as Maasai villages in the heart of the African bush. Visitors are promised a chance to live the life of a Maasai person, meet with Maasai families, visit the village huts, "watch a bloodletting ceremony" and even "venture to a local school or clinic". The aim of the experience, the advertising brochures claim, is to be immersed in "the fascinating ancestry of these noble people".¹² Similar expectations also lead tourists in Paris to strive for sipping a *café noisette* at the outdoor tables of a café, walking along the shady *boulevards* of the first *arrondissement*, or buying a freshly baked *baguette* at the *boulangerie* - in short, to experience firsthand the quotidian life of the city and get as close as possible to what they expect to be the essence of its people and their habits.

While cultural tourism has attracted the attention of scholars due to its economic potential, it has also entered heated theoretical debates about cultural heritage, globalization, and cultural identities.¹³ Next to what are considered to be the benefits of cultural tourism, such as economic development, fostering of heritage conservation, and an overall improvement of communities' wellbeing,¹⁴ cultural tourism is held responsible for several problems among which gentrification and outmigration processes, competition among members of the communities over resources and space, the loss of authenticity and of the cultural diversity of tourist destinations, and their "museumification."¹⁵ Even more radically, cultural tourism is involved in processes of economic inequality and of cultural appropriation relating to its colonial legacy.¹⁶

In this contribution, we won't take into account any of these concerns directly. Rather, we will restrict our survey to investigating the motivations that underlie cultural tourism as a peculiar aesthetic practice. While rethinking the aesthetics of cultural tourism clearly does not solve problems caused by intense touristic exploitation, the shift towards a different aesthetic framework in tourist studies might help us cast new light on how tourists relate to the visited cultural environments.

2.1 The Search for Aesthetic Pleasure

Besides the many social, economic, and anthropological variables that characterize cultural tourism, one first motivation is undisputedly the fulfillment of generally pleasurable experiences.¹⁷ The type of expectations that animate cultural tourists, however, are not only relaxation, fun, recreation, entertainment, relief from fatigue or distraction. As studies testify, tourism in general and cultural tourism more specifically are often driven by aesthetic considerations, aimed at some forms of *aesthetic pleasure*.¹⁸

The aesthetic interest of the tourist has been notably analysed by British sociologist John Urry in his seminal examination of tourism as a social practice.¹⁹ Urry relies on Michel Foucault's concept of 'the gaze' in the history of medical institutions in order to describe the particular attitude adopted by tourists towards the environment, the objects, the people, and the events that they encounter during their travel. Urry calls this attitude the *tourist gaze*. The tourist gaze is for Urry not a natural nor a purely modern phenomenon, but one which has emerged under specific historical circumstances in Western bourgeois culture. In particular, Urry traces its roots back to earlier configurations of travel such as the 'Grand Tour'— the travel through the main European cities and places of cultural interest which was considered, from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, an essential part of the education of young people from upper-class families.²⁰ The tourist gaze, however, only fully formed as a result of the exponential growth of personal travel in the second part of the twentieth century.²¹

From a theoretical point of view, the tourist gaze can be described as a way of perceiving or relating to places that cuts them off from the 'real world' and emphasizes the exotic aspects of the tourist experience.²² According to Urry, casting a tourist gaze upon the visited place amounts to departing from one's own established routines and contrasting the new environment with the ordinary and familiar one. Enhanced by the physical distance of the visitor from her own home, the tourist gaze is, consistently, "constructed through difference" that is, through the distance separating everyday, familiar, and routinary situations and objects from what is seen as unfamiliar and extraordinary in the visited place.²³ The distance inherent to the tourist gaze entails indeed the objectification and aestheticization of what is observed. In this sense, the tourist gaze amounts to an attitude that allows the visitor to enjoy the look of the toured object for its own sake, devoid of practical implication, extraordinary, worth experiencing, and, much like art, worth preserving—at least in one's own memory. The role of tourists as detached aesthetic beholders is further attested by their usual need to crystallize the experience by means of pictures and videos: "People linger over [the tourist gaze] which is then normally visually objectified or captured through photographs, postcards, films, models and so on. These enable the gaze to be endlessly reproduced and recaptured."²⁴

As it has been noticed, Urry's tourist gaze can be located within a specific model of aesthetic appreciation,²⁵ the so-called model of aesthetic distance. Epitomized by Edward Bullough²⁶ through the concept of "psychic distance", the notion of aesthetic distancing leans on a philosophical tradition that echoes the Kantian notions of contemplation and disinterested delight. In this model, distance is what allows for the fundamental distinction between fully-fledged aesthetic experiences and experiences of what is merely agreeable. While the latter are conceived as entailing a "non-distanced pleasure" that affects the self directly and immediately, the emergence of aesthetic value is seen as impossible without the insertion of a certain distance. Detachment is therefore required for the experiencer to aesthetically appreciate the experienced object. Aesthetic experience is thus only possible when observers remain at a fixed and adequate distance from the object. According to many, such a model has been dominating traditional Western aesthetics since the Eighteenth Century, shaping our notion of aesthetic appreciation as grounded in "separation, isolation, contemplation, and distance."²⁷

2.2. The Search for Immersive Authenticity

Another compelling driving force relates more specifically to the qualities of what is encountered during the visit. While adopting the detached, aesthetic attitude characterizing the tourist gaze, tourists expect their experiences to lack those qualities explicitly intended for tourist satisfaction. As Todd remarks,²⁸ cultural tourism is indeed motivated by a desire to experience people and places "more or less unaffected by the various influences that govern the tourist's everyday reality". This corresponds to what he calls the "un-touristed". On the one hand, tourists strive to finally find themselves immersed in that special place they have only seen in postcards, movies, or in the glossy pages of travel magazines and catchy websites. On the other hand, though, they perceive it as crucial that this experience be a *firsthand* experience. They aim to be present in, interact with, and feel connected to the selected locale, so as to be able to seize its 'true', 'real', 'authentic' essence. Notably, this interest is not limited to contemporary people and cultures but rather overpasses time, crosses social classes, and embraces the routine of distant eras. Cultural tourists are therefore often fueled by a wish to travel back in time,²⁹ towards idyllic and untouched townscapes, where time moves slowly if at all.

The being real, unspoiled, true to itself of a place represents thus a key value when it comes to assessing a touristic experience.³⁰ This search for the un-touristed also manifests itself in the particular fascination of tourists with the 'lives of others.' According to Dean MacCannell, tourists desire to share in the 'real life' of the places visited, to get in with the natives, or at least to see how life "as it really is lived"³¹ is reflected in the appearance of those places. They long for insights in the intimate backstage everyday of the locals: "Being 'one of them', or at one with

‘them’ [...] to see behind the others’ mere performances, to perceive and accept the others for what they really are.”³²

To this extent, the ordinary life of the visited place only becomes the object of the tourist’s aesthetic experience as long as the observed routines, habits, and daily activities present themselves as genuine and, so to speak, indifferent to the curious gaze and wandering of the visitor. In short, cultural tourism, as a social practice, fundamentally amounts to a *quest for authenticity*, understood as an immersive experience in the real-life of a certain place.³³ Stressing the relevance of the notion of authenticity in the tourism discourse, MacCannell,³⁴ for example, has gone so far as to define tourism “a modern version of the universal human concern with the sacred.” The tourist, he argues, is a kind of contemporary pilgrim, seeking authenticity in other ‘times’ and other ‘places.’³⁵

An admittedly slippery notion when considering such items as culture, habits, and traditions, authenticity certainly plays a central role in tourism marketers’ strategies and deeply shapes tourists’ expectations. The whole rhetoric of tourism is based on claims to the authenticity of what is seen. In tourism advertising, for example, not only are we confronted with the classical motifs of ‘the *typical* medieval house’, ‘the *very* place where Napoleon slept’, ‘the *actual* pen used to sign the law’, ‘the *original* manuscript of the famous book’, ‘the *real* piece of the *true* city walls’, but also with common refrains about locations that are ‘off the beaten track’, ‘off the tourist circuit’, ‘unspoiled’, ‘patronized by the locals.’ In Jonathan Culler’s words,³⁶ “The distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic, the natural and the touristy, is a powerful semi-otic operator within tourism.”

3. The Dilemma of Cultural Tourism

In the previous section, we argued that tourists aim to draw aesthetic pleasure from observing how daily life and its routines enroll in the selected tourist destination. Importantly, they do so via the adoption of what we have called the ‘tourist gaze’, a special kind of aesthetic gaze that leads the subject to a process of aesthetic detachment, estrangement, or defamiliarization from what she observes. On the other hand, tourists also expect that what they see is true and genuine. They want to experience the everyday life of the place they are visiting as it really is—unspoiled, unaltered, *untouristed*. For this purpose, they direct their attention towards visible signs that can attest to its authenticity—plaques, signals, markings, and other devices that serve as symbols or representations of the site’s integrity.

Although being equally relevant to the tourist experience, these two aesthetic drives cannot be satisfied at once. When tourists gaze upon other people’s everyday life, they look for contexts and practices that are not standardly conceived to be appreciated aesthetically but are rather lived in or performed by the locals for functional purposes. Tourists visiting Maasai

villages, for example, aim to get as close as possible to the people's habits—or at least, to what they assume these must be. For this reason, they aspire to experience directly objects and activities that seem to them as bearing the 'marker of authenticity' of the true Maasai, such as grazing the flocks in the savannah or attending to the preparation of traditional meals. All these things, which are just practicalities for the village inhabitants, are contemplated by tourists with an eye that prompts a form of aesthetic detachment. Observing the everyday life of these African people via the tourist gaze, however, visitors are led to detach themselves from it, and this ultimately prevents them from grasping the place's authentic quality.

This example helps highlight the structural contradiction that is implicit in cultural tourism: experiencing the authentic everydayness of a certain place through aesthetic detachment. An analogous problem is known to arise in anthropology with regard to the case of so-called participant observation.³⁷ By practicing this method, the ethnologist finds herself in the following situation. She is expected to participate fully and immersively in the life of the community she is studying, but at the same time, she is also required to maintain the detached attitude that is needed to analyze, evaluate and describe what characterizes the relevant community as interesting, peculiar or distinctive.

Similarly, tourists look for a full immersion in what they assume should be the ordinary life of the selected destination - how life is really lived by the locals - yet they also expect to do so whilst maintaining the aesthetic attitude that is implicit in their role as visitors or outsiders. This creates friction, for it seems that in the very moment in which everydayness becomes the object of the tourist gaze, something of what is authentic of a place gets lost for the visitor. If tourists cannot escape their tourist gaze,³⁸ they end up wanting what by definition they cannot have precisely because they are tourists, i.e., grasping immersively the authentic nature of a place while detaching from it aesthetically.³⁹

Trapped in their role of aesthetic appreciators, tourists can only afford to seize the mere appearance of the real, ordinary life of the visited place. Not by chance, as Culler puts it, tourists "fan out" to collect these signs of authenticity:

[...] of Frenchness, typical Italian behavior, exemplary Oriental scenes, typical American thruways, traditional English pubs; and, deaf to the natives' explanations that thruways just are the most efficient way to get from one place to another or that pubs are simply convenient places to meet your friends and have a drink, [...] tourists persist in regarding these objects and practices as cultural signs.⁴⁰

Tour organizers, in turn, offer *signs* and *markers* of authenticity—souvenirs, postcards, statues, pictures—to influence how tourists think and feel with respect to the visited places.⁴¹ This process

becomes all the more important as the distance between one's normal place of residence and the object of the tourist gaze increases. Markers of authenticity provide the frame for what is worth gazing upon, so that authenticity ends up consisting in what *appears* or *looks* authentic.⁴² Authenticity in tourism is thus merely 'staged' or 'pretended', inasmuch as the toured object is designed and set up to be recognized and labeled as genuine or real.⁴³ Whatever it is that the tourist is going to see, it is no longer 'authentic' just because the tourists are there. In Culler's words:

The paradox, the dilemma of authenticity, is that to be experienced as authentic it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself, and hence lacks the authenticity of what is truly unspoiled, untouched by mediating cultural codes [...] The authentic sight requires markers, but our notion of the authentic is the unmarked.⁴⁴

4. Cultural Tourism and Everyday Aesthetics

Cultural tourism gives rise to a tension between a notion of the tourist gaze that entails some form of aesthetic detachment and the need to appreciate authentic features of a place's ordinary routine. Interestingly, a parallel concern characterizes the methodological debate in everyday aesthetics. Everyday aestheticians have thoroughly discussed how we can have an aesthetic experience of everyday life practices and activities. Among the several strategies that have been put forward in the debate, two main approaches have emerged. Either having an aesthetic appreciation of the ordinary is construed as implying a process of distancing, detachment, or estrangement from everyday life; or it is seen as requiring an attempt to aesthetically appreciate the ordinary as such. In the next sections, we will introduce these approaches in turn and apply them to the case of cultural tourism.

The former strategy proposed by everyday aestheticians to aesthetically appreciate everyday life claims that the ordinary can be aesthetically appreciated if we subject it to a process of 'defamiliarization,'⁴⁵ which aims at making it appear extra-ordinary and worthy of aesthetic interest. According to Allen Carlson,⁴⁶ defamiliarization comes in three main forms. The first is a version of classic formalism and consists in trying to seize aesthetically appreciable features in the formal aspects of things that are commonly thought to be lacking in aesthetic value, such as everyday objects.⁴⁷ The second interprets defamiliarization as a sort of "artification", that is, a mechanism through which everyday objects and situations are shaped into something 'art-like'.⁴⁸ The third construes defamiliarization as a process of 'aestheticization' of the everyday, through the adoption of an aesthetic attitude that "casts an aura" on the object of experience.⁴⁹ What is commonly taken to be aesthetically uninteresting is 'manipulated' so as to acquire an aesthetic appeal.

On all these accounts of defamiliarization, everyday life is regarded as so familiar, ordinary, and routine-like that it forms a kind of frameless background. In order for this background to count as a proper object for aesthetics, it needs to be rendered out-of-the-ordinary, unfamiliar, or strange: it needs, that is, to be put in a frame. The underlying intuition is that one can discover a surprisingly rich aesthetic dimension in the otherwise mundane and ordinary parts of daily life if one just isolates them from their ordinary context and sheds a different light on them. In John Dewey's terms,⁵⁰ this implies making the anesthetic flow of our everydayness become "an experience" endowed with pervasive character and a cohesive internal structure, and thus able to unearth latent aesthetic values in the most ordinary and routine.

Processes of distancing, estrangement, and "casting an aura", which are meant to make us appreciate what we generally overlook as humdrum routine, are admittedly in place in cultural tourism. As they turn flocks grazing in Maasai villages, cigar making in Cuban plantations, or eating a *pain au chocolat* in a Parisian café into aesthetic phenomena by adopting the tourist gaze, cultural tourists 'manipulate' these quotidian activities in order to make them the extraordinary object of their aesthetic appreciation.

A fruitful way of referring to defamiliarization is what Finnish philosopher Arto Haapala calls "strangeness."⁵¹ Strangeness is the basic experience we undergo when we find ourselves in a new environment, for example when we visit a foreign city for the first time and we try to navigate our way in the midst of unfamiliar streets and constructions. Experiencing strangeness, according to Haapala, leads to an intensification of our sensual perception resulting in a better appreciation of the environment's aesthetic features: "When we face something unfamiliar, we pay special attention to it. We observe the thing, we try to categorize it, we may think as to what to do with the object, whether it is of any use for us or not. We are also particularly attentive to its aesthetic potentiality."⁵² Strangeness involves the adoption of what Haapala terms the "outsider's gaze", an attitude that—owing to the lack of practical interests that characterize our attitude at home—makes us sensitive to details and features we generally ignore in our familiar environment, such as "the color of public transport vehicles, the color of telephone boxes, the sound of the metro cars, the smell of the sea, etc."⁵³ Just like the tourist gaze and the visitor's interest, the outsider's gaze implies a particular focus "on the look of things" (*ibid.*) and in this regard, provides the visitor with a particularly appropriate setting for aesthetic considerations.

A promising attitude when trying to appraise the aesthetic qualities of one's own routine, in the case of touristic practices defamiliarization widens the gap between the search for authenticity and the need for aesthetic pleasure and therefore risks intensifying the inherent contradiction of cultural tourism. As a matter of fact, activities such as animal feeding, craftsmanship, and having breakfast are functional to the aims of survival and, more generally, to human wellbeing.

As such, they require some form of practical engagement that contrasts with aesthetic detachment. Even though processes of defamiliarization may allow one to focus on some aesthetic salience of such activities that would otherwise remain in the background, they also make it so that their everyday quality remains out of reach. When residents' ordinary life is filtered through the tourist gaze, it lends itself to aesthetic appreciation only as long as its inherent ordinariness is rendered out-of-the-ordinary.

The second approach proposed by everyday aestheticians to reconcile aesthetic appreciation and everyday life maintains that we should be able to aesthetically grasp the ordinary *without* manipulating it, that is, to experience it 'as such'. Haapala,⁵⁴ for example, has argued that familiar places, although hardly surprising or new, nevertheless "give us pleasure through a kind of comforting stability, through the feeling of being at home and taking pleasure in carrying out normal routines in a setting that is 'safe'". Alternatively, it is possible to point out how aesthetic experiences, judgments, and values are intertwined with other experiences, judgments, and values that are central to people's daily lives. One can focus for instance on the pleasure gained by the appropriate functioning of commonplace objects and tools, thereby considering the intersection of aesthetic and practical concerns,⁵⁵ or dwell on the role played by the knowledge one has of a familiar object's function and significance for its aesthetic appreciation.⁵⁶

Within this framework, Yuriko Saito has remarked on the importance of paying mindful attention to all neglected features of the ordinary. Assuming a mindful attitude - be it eminently perceptual, affective or cognitive⁵⁷ - can make one uncover aesthetic qualities even in those apparently humdrum aspects of the daily grind.⁵⁸ Attentiveness is indeed what discloses the aesthetic value of things. It is the prerequisite of any kind of aesthetic experience and leads one to grasp what is aesthetically valuable without distorting their everyday nature, therefore discarding a purely 'honorific' understanding of aesthetics.⁵⁹ Not only beauty and sublimity, but also functionality, comfort, safety, and familiarity; not only traditionally positive values, but also negative qualities such as dreariness, tediousness, or monotony may thus appear to be aesthetically significant.⁶⁰

This mindful focus on the neglected aesthetic aspects of everyday life, however, should not be understood as a form of detached contemplation. It is rather a participatory form of perception that leads the subject to immerse herself in what she experiences and actively interact with it. Throughout his long career in aesthetics, Arnold Berleant has been investigating this participatory model of aesthetic appreciation as the counterpart of the detached attitude that, to his mind, has been the predominant paradigm in Western aesthetic theorizing so far.⁶¹ There is, according to Berleant, an aesthetically relevant way of relating not only to artworks but to our environment in the broadest possible sense that does not require distance or detachment. On

the contrary, the most desirable and efficient aesthetic attitude requires that one *engages* with what one is experiencing.

Engagement entails a form of active and immersive perception, i.e., a perceptual activity that is enhanced and sustained by the knowledge one has of a certain place or object, the social and cultural meanings attached to them, personal and collective associations, imaginings, and memories. Importantly, this implies the loss of primacy of visual awareness, which is overtaken by the involvement of all senses including kinesthesia, that is, one's bodily awareness of the environment. As Berleant puts it, this way of perceiving is "*direct* rather than pure" in that it is immediate, unreflective, but at the same time composite and complex. This immersive perception, which puts us in contact with the environment, is aesthetic in its own right: "It is in this sense that we engage aesthetically with environment and other modes of art. Perceptual engagement is the catalyzing and unifying force of the aesthetic field."⁶²

If they can be conceived as mindfully engaged perceivers, the aesthetic subjects are no longer separated from the object of their experience. Rather, they are seen as part of an *aesthetic field* of forces that interact with one another resulting in an "integrated and unified experience" of aesthetic appreciation.⁶³ The physical juxtaposition between a subject and an object is transformed into a personal encounter that activates a primitive and unreflective form of engagement.

Applied to cultural tourism, the engagement paradigm implies that the tourist practice be reconfigured as an immersive relation to the toured place, environment, or cultural habit, rather than as a form of aesthetic detachment. This multisensory perceptual immersion mobilizes all possible cognitive resources that integrate the perceptual access to the visited place. Viewed through the lenses of aesthetic immersion, the tourist appears to be part of the surrounding environment as an actor rather than as a spectator. In turn, to paraphrase Berleant, the tourist destination is redescribed as a realm of dynamic powers that engage both the tourist and the visited place, the people, and their habits, in a unified experience "turning the world we inhabit into a truly human habitation".⁶⁴ Accordingly, as in all instances of aesthetic engagement, aesthetic experience becomes a dynamic process emerging from the interaction between the tourist and the visited object, environment, or situation. And just like the subject of aesthetic engagement, if the tourist becomes aware of the process in which she is immersed, then she might become more receptive, attentive, open, and disposed to grab all inputs coming from the surrounding context. In the next section, we will analyse these possible attitude changes in more detail.

5. Aesthetic Engagement in Cultural Tourism

As we have seen, the aesthetic engagement paradigm provides an alternative theoretical framework to that of aesthetic detachment offered by the tourist gaze, one that appears beneficial for addressing

the internal frictions characterizing cultural tourism. Notably, the problems of a defamiliarizing approach to tourist practices have also been explored by recent scholarship in tourism. In the past decades, researchers have increasingly questioned the efficacy of Urry's notion, underlying the performative and multi-sensuous nature of the act of gazing and the complex relations and dynamics it involves. This insistence on 'the gaze' has been criticized for entailing a mind/body dualistic framework, which portrays tourists as detached, passive observers and reduces them to a dematerialised pair of eyes.⁶⁵ In this sense, Urry's gaze overlooks the importance of the body and of the other senses in the tourist experience.⁶⁶ Based on this concern, a shift has been invoked from how tourists *look at* what they visit touristic localities, to what tourists *do* with their bodies – how they proactively engage in and with space. Prioritizing agency and performativity to visual aspects and sight, tourism has thus been reassessed as a matter of performing – a practical, sensual, and embodied encounter with the world - rather than as a purely visual experience.

In this approach, the body is not treated merely as a thing or a tool for doing something but rather as a situated vector allowing for an embodied reconfiguration of touristic experience. This interest in the body as an active, expressive, and sensitive "body-subject"⁶⁷ has opened to novel trajectories in tourism studies investigating the multi-sensory dimension of tourism. Research highlights the role of senses like taste, smell, touch, sound, and proprioception, either taken separately or in combination, in tourist practices.⁶⁸ For example, it has been pointed out that auditory components have a crucial impact on how tourists relate to the visited location - think of the silence of the wide, open spaces of wild nature compared to the chaotic background of the metropolis. Furthermore, taste and smell significantly contribute to articulating the tourist experience - consider for instance the importance odors have in characterizing the perceived identity of a destination or how much culinary traditions influence our overall sense of place. Finally, haptic senses including touch, kinesthesia, and proprioception have a key function in structuring the space in which one is immersed via the relationship between one's body, the encountered objects (e.g., buildings, urban and natural elements, formal and implicit borders), and people. This way of conceiving of experience in tourism as heterogeneous, multimodal, and immersive also entails that aesthetic pleasure in cultural tourism results from an engaged exercise of immersion in the material and cultural environment rather than from a form of detached attitude.

While the relevance of embodiment and multi-sensoriality has produced a fruitful debate in recent tourism scholarship, we suggest that further theoretical effort may help to fully unveil the potential of this embodied approach in tourism studies. In this regard, the conceptual tools provided by current discussions in everyday aesthetics seem to offer an inspiring base to clarify aspects of the embodied interplay between tourists and the encountered cultural world. In particular, the notion of aesthetic engagement, as discussed in the previous section, may foster and

complement this ‘embodied turn’ in tourism studies emphasizing the complex interaction between tourists and the aesthetic ‘field of forces’ around them.

First, as we have seen, aesthetic engagement implies that the tourist is seen as acknowledging her own position in space-time and is aware of the specific contribution she can give to the context she participates in. As advocates of engagement contend, thinking of aesthetic experience as an active and immersive form of perception can foster the development of a special aesthetic sensibility, which may encourage more mindful forms of relationship with our surroundings. While Berleant defines this kind of sensibility as a culturally bound sense-perception emerging in the interconnectedness of individuals, environment, society, and culture, Saito contrasts it with Western traditional aesthetic sensibility based on detachment.⁶⁹ However described, this ‘new’ aesthetic sensibility demands that we go beyond our normal attitude towards the objects and the environment that surround us and that we:

[...] encourage ourselves to put aside preconceived ideas associated with them and allow them to speak to us and engage us. Such open-mindedness and receptivity have ethical importance. They also guide us to live mindfully by paying careful attention to things and surroundings. In short, our aesthetic horizons become widened and our lives enriched.⁷⁰

In the specific case of cultural tourism, the emergence of this aesthetic sensibility might enable the tourist to appreciate her experience as a visitor immersively by plunging herself into that experience, interacting with the local people, and, possibly, partaking in their practices in a more mindful way.⁷¹ Opposed to the distancing gaze promoted by the touristic machine, the assumption of an embodied, participatory attitude would thus reduce the gap between the tourist as a detached subject and the explored culture as a museified object. Once aesthetic distance is removed, the tourist may find herself more prone to grasp and enjoy a wide variety of aspects of the resort, including the negative ones, which the standard marketing advertisements often try to hide. Indeed, despite what the tourism industry promises, the reality around us is not an “aesthetic utopia”.⁷² There are no heavenly corners, untouched paradises, or unaffected oases that are able to fully satisfy our quest for pure aesthetic appreciation. Every place comprises aspects and elements that can harm our aesthetic sensibility and obstruct our taste, ranging from the cheap-looking objects and poorly-made souvenirs in local stores to the stench of Paris *métro* stations, the endless lines before monuments and historical buildings, the disillusioned and un-inspired attitude of the local guide, the constant and widespread presence of technologies even in the most remote and uncontaminated land, insipid traditional cuisine disappointing our expectations, and so on and so forth.

Furthermore, in the immediacy and immersiveness of the engagement experience, visitors may be more open to accept, understand, and appreciate all aspects of the visited place's quotidian life for what they are, without necessarily striving for signs of staged and possibly counterfeit authenticity. One possible consequence of this shift is that tourists become more inclined to appreciate in a playful and ironic way even the more kitsch, vulgar, unsophisticated, or unconventional aspects of the destination and may thereby avoid incurring in those typical forms of disappointment that result from a preemptive idealization of the visited place.⁷³

Finally, if the tourist gaze is reconfigured as a mindful, engaged attitude, and if such an attitude can be adopted in one's own everyday life, then being a tourist may not be so different from being able to appreciate one's own familiar environment. This might help soften the radical opposition between one's aesthetic experience as a tourist and one's experience at home to a point where it becomes aesthetically irrelevant. In this spirit, many recent studies have pointed out how the sharp dichotomy between the ordinariness of everyday life and the extraordinariness of tourism may not be as clear-cut as it seems to be. This dichotomy, it has been claimed, has been artificially construed for research purposes but is rather unfaithful to the reality of cultural tourism.⁷⁴ Through engagement, subjects may be led to switch off "the autopilot" of their everyday life⁷⁵ and may thus find themselves better equipped to enjoy their familiar milieu and the practicalities it involves. As tourists, they may become more open and sensitive to anything the place and its inhabitants may show them.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we argued that cultural tourism, considered as an aesthetic practice, is intrinsically problematic. Motivated by the search for aesthetic fulfillment through the detachment that characterizes the 'tourist gaze', cultural tourism is also driven by a quest for immersion in the authentic everyday routines of the visited places. These two desiderata, however, seem to be mutually irreconcilable. We examined this tension by considering the two alternative approaches proposed by everyday aestheticians on how to account for the aesthetic appreciation of everyday objects, habits, and situations. Based on this discussion, we outlined what we contend are the main advantages of adopting an engaged, mindful attitude when practicing cultural tourism. Abandoning a detached and objectifying gaze, the engaged tourist manages to immerse herself in the cultural habits of the visited resort. This process of aesthetic immersion reduces the distance between the visitor and the local and encourages tourists to go beyond the markers of authenticity imposed by the standard tourism advertising. Importantly, while the shift from detachment to engagement requires the refinement of one's aesthetic sensitivity, it also leads to an enrichment of tourists' embodied experience.

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² Boorstin, D. J. *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961/1992); MacCannell, D. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (University of California Press, 1976/1999).

³ See for example: Adler, J. "Travel as a Performed Art," *American Journal of Sociology* 94 n. 6 (1989): 1366-1391; Tribe, J., ed., *Philosophical Issues in Tourism* (London: Channel View Press, 2009); Todd, C. "The Importance of the Aesthetic," in *Routledge Handbook of Tourism and the Environment*, edited by A. Holden and D. Fennell (New York: Routledge, 2012), 65-74.

⁴ See, respectively: Saito, Y. *Aesthetics of the Familiar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Di Stefano, E. *Che cos'è l'estetica quotidiana* (Carocci: Roma, 2018); Highmore, B. "Homework: Routine, social aesthetics and the ambiguity of everyday life," *Cultural Studies*, 18, n. 2-3 (2004): 306-327; Diaconu, M. "Longing for Clouds: Does Beautiful Weather Have to Be Fine?," *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 15 (2013); Iannilli, G.L. "How Can Everyday Aesthetics Meet Fashion?," *Studi di Estetica*, 7 (2017): 229-246; Norman, D. *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Shove, E., Watson, M., Hand, M. and Ingram, J. *The Design of Everyday Life*. (Oxford: Berg, 2007); Tuan, Y. *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture*, (Washington, D. C.: Island Press, 1993); Carlson, A. "On the Aesthetic Appreciation of Japanese Gardens," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 37, n. 1 (1997): 47-56; Brady, E., Brook, I., and Prior, J., eds., *Between Nature and Culture: The Aesthetics of Modified Environments* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018); Carlson, A. *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2000); Parsons, G., Allen C. *Functional Beauty*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Parsons, G. *The Philosophy of Design* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016); van Etteger, R., Thompson, I. H., and Vicenzotti, V. "Aesthetic Creation Theory and Landscape Architecture," *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 11 (2016): 80-89.

⁵ Mandoki, K. *Everyday Aesthetics. Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁶ Among the few contributions on tourism, the following are worth mentioning: Rynnänen, M. "Learning from Venice," *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 1, (2005) and Salazar, G. "Another One Bites the Dust!" *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 8 (2010).

⁷ Cf. UNWTO - International Tourist Organisation (2019).

⁸ Cohen, E. "A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences," *Sociology*, 13, n. 2 (1979): 179-201; Urry, J. *The Tourist Gaze* (London: SAGE, 1990/2002).

⁹ See, for example: Franklin, A. "Art tourism: A new field for tourist studies," *Tourist Studies*, 18, n. 4 (2018): 399-416.

¹⁰ See: McKercher, B., Du Cros, H. *Cultural Tourism*, 3rd Edition. (New York: Routledge, 2020). In the literature these practices are often referred to as 'cultural heritage tourism' or 'heritage tourism'. In this text we prefer the label 'cultural tourism' in that it seems to better highlight the difference between such practices and art tourism.

¹¹ World Tourism Organization. 2018. UNWTO Annual Report 2017, <https://www.unwto.org/global/publication/unwto-annual-report-2017>. Accessed 03/12/2021.

¹² <https://localadventures.travel/experience/tanzania-cultural-excursions-c092410>. Accessed 09/08/2021.

¹³ See for example: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. *Destination Culture. Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (University of California Press, 1998); Richards, G. *Rethinking Cultural Tourism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2021).

¹⁴ McKercher, Du Cros, *Cultural Tourism*, 30.

¹⁵ McKercher, Du Cros, *Cultural Tourism*, 37.

¹⁶ Said, E. W. *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978); Richards, G. *Rethinking Cultural Tourism*. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2021); Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*.

¹⁷ Richards, *Rethinking Cultural Tourism*.

¹⁸ Todd, "Nature, Beauty and Tourism," and "The Importance of the Aesthetic"; Naukarinen, O. "Aesthetics and Mobility - A Short Introduction into a Moving Field", *Contemporary Aesthetics*, n. 3 (2005); Kirillova, K., Lehto, X. "Destination Aesthetics and Aesthetic Distance in Tourism Experience," *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 32, n. 8 (2015). In an attempt to overcome the dominant, over-simplistic view in the consumer behavior literature that reduces tourist aesthetic evaluation to a single dimensional variable such as "the place is beautiful", Kirillova and Lehto (2015) put forward a multi-dimensional model for the assessment of tourist satisfaction. The identified variables, ranging from sound, to balance, to shape, demonstrate the existence, relevance and complexity of an aesthetic component in tourism.

¹⁹ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*.

²⁰ Adler, "Travel as a Performed Art", 1370.

²¹ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 4-5.

²² Harrison, R., *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (New York, Routledge, 2013), 107.

²³ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2.

²⁴ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 3.

²⁵ Howard, C.A. *Mobile Lifeworlds: An Ethnography of Tourism and Pilgrimage in the Himalayas*. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 34.

²⁶ Bullough, E. "'Psychical distance' as a factor in art and an aesthetic principle," *British Journal of Psychology*, 5 (1912): 87-118.

²⁷ Berleant, A. *Art and Engagement* (Temple University Press, 1991), 32; Scruton, R. *Modern Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 36, maintains that the 'visitor' provides the paradigmatic case of aesthetic gaze.

²⁸ Todd, "The Importance of the Aesthetic", 72.

²⁹ Taylor, J. *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist's Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

³⁰ Kirillova, Lehto, "Destination Aesthetics and Aesthetic Distance in Tourism Experience", 12.

³¹ MacCannell, D. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (University of California Press, 1976/1999), 94.

³² Ibid.

³³ Boorstin, D. J. *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961/1992); MacCannell, D. "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings," *American Journal of Sociology*, 79 (1973): 589–603; Cohen, E. "A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences," *Sociology*, 13, n. 2 (1979): 179–201 and "Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15 (1988): 371–386; Wang, J. "Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26, n. 2 (1999): 349–370; Taylor, J. "Authenticity and Sincerity in Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28 (2001): 17–26; Reisinger, Y., Steiner, C.J. "Reconceptualizing object authenticity," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33, n. 1 (2006): 65–86.

³⁴ MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 49.

³⁵ MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 42–48. See also Turner, V., Turner E. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

³⁶ Culler, J. "Semiotics of Tourism," *American Journal of Semiotics*, 1 n. 1/2 (1981): 127–40.

³⁷ Malinowski, B. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul LTD, 1922).

³⁸ Todd, "The Importance of the Aesthetic", 72.

³⁹ In a previous work, we have treated this problem as a "paradox". See Benenti, M., Giombini L. "The Aesthetic Paradox of Tourism," in *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, edited by V. Moura and C. Vaughan, 12 (2020): 1–31.

⁴⁰ Culler, "Semiotics of Tourism", 127.

⁴¹ MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 110. The notion of a marker, here, stands for any kind of information or representation (signboards, touristic signals, pamphlets) that constitutes a touristic attraction by giving information about it, representing it, making it recognizable.

⁴² Culler, "Semiotics of Tourism", 5.

⁴³ MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*.

⁴⁴ Culler, "Semiotics of Tourism", 8.

⁴⁵ See: Saito, Y. *Everyday Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and *Aesthetics of the Familiar*.

⁴⁶ Carlson, A. "The Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics," in *Aesthetics of Everyday Life: East and West*, edited by L. Yuedi and C.L. Carter, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 48–64.

⁴⁷ Carlson mutuates this conception from such art critics as Clive Bell and Roger Fry who defended formalism at the beginning of the 20th century.

⁴⁸ Dissanayake, E. "Becoming Homo Aestheticus: Sources of Aesthetic Imagination in Mother-Infant Interactions," *Substance*, 30, n. 1/2 (2001): 85–103; Naukarinen, "Aesthetics and Mobility - A Short Introduction into a Moving Field".

⁴⁹ Leddy, T. *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Broadview Press, 2012).

⁵⁰ Dewey, J. *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Press, 1934).

⁵¹ Haapala, A. "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place," in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, edited by A. Light and J.M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 39–55.

⁵² Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place", 44.

⁵³ Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place", 43–44.

⁵⁴ Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place", 50.

⁵⁵ Forsey, J. "The Promise, the Challenge, of Everyday Aesthetics," *Aisthesis*, 7, n. 1 (2014): 5–21.

⁵⁶ Carlson, "The Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics", 48–64.

⁵⁷ See respectively, Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*; Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place"; Carlson, "The Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics".

⁵⁸ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*.

⁵⁹ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 27.

⁶⁰ See respectively: Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place"; Carlson, "The Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics"; and Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

⁶¹ Berleant, *Art and Engagement*.

⁶² Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, 92.

⁶³ Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, 49. For a perspective combining the idea of "aesthetic field" with the notion of extended mind, see: Matteucci, G., *Eстетика e natura umana. La mente estesa tra percezione, emozione ed espressione* (Roma: Carocci, 2019).

⁶⁴ Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, 104.

⁶⁵ Veijola, S., Jokinen, E. "The Body in Tourism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 11, n. 3 (1994): 125–51.

⁶⁶ Accordingly, the tourist gaze has been criticized for exemplifying a masculine, western-based, white middle-class perspective, as well as for not paying sufficient attention to the multiple sensual, practical, and material aspects of tourism (Veijola, Jokinen, "The Body in Tourism," is the *locus classicus* for this criticism. For recent discussion see: Everingham P., Obrador, P., and Tucker, H. "Trajectories of embodiment in Tourist Studies," *Tourist Studies*, 21, n. 1 (2021): 70–83.

⁶⁷ Obrador, P. "Being-on-Holiday: Tourist Dwelling, Bodies and Place," *Tourist Studies* 3, n. 1 (2003): 47–66.

⁶⁸ Everingham, Obrador, and Tucker, "Trajectories of embodiment in Tourist Studies".

⁶⁹ See respectively, Berleant, A. "Aesthetic Sensibility," *Ambiances. Pragmatism Today* 6, n. 2 (2015): 38–47 and Saito, "Aesthetics of the Familiar", 46.

⁷⁰ Saito, Y. "The Ethical Dimensions of Aesthetic Engagement," *ESPES*, 6, n. 2 (2017): 17–18.

⁷¹ From this perspective, it would be interesting to take into account the point of view of the local communities with which tourists interact: service providers, workers who guide the tourists throughout the sites, and local people enduring the many side effects of mass tourism including the gentrification of residential areas, museification, etc. Exploring such a point of view, however, is the matter for further inquiry.

⁷² Saito, "The Ethical Dimensions of Aesthetic Engagement", 26.

⁷³ See, for example, De Botton, A. *The Art of Travel* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004). On average, twenty Japanese tourists among the millions that visit Paris every year are so disconcerted by the gap between reality and their idealized image of the city, that they fall prey to the so-called *Paris syndrome*, a condition characterized by a number of psychiatric symptoms including delusional states, derealization, depersonalization and anxiety (Viala, A., Ota, H., Vacheron, M.N., Martin, P., and Caroli, F. “Les japonais en voyage pathologique à Paris: un modèle original de prise en charge transculturelle,” *Nervure de journal Psychiatrie*, 5 (2004): 31–34). According to a BBC report, the disease is spreading to different countries now, with many Chinese tourists experiencing the same issue. To discourage calls about the Paris Syndrome, the Japanese embassy had even to post a disclaimer on its website.

⁷⁴ De Botton, *The Art of Travel*; Uriely, N. “The tourist experience. Conceptual developments,” *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32, n. 1 (2005): 199–216; Bærenholdt, O. J., Haldrup, M., Larsen, J., and Urry, J. *Performing tourist places* (Hants, Burlington: Ashgate, 2007); Larsen, J. “De-exoticizing tourist travel: everyday life and sociality on the move,” *Leisure Studies*, 27 (2008): 21–34; Stylianou-Lambert, T. “Gazing from Home: Cultural Tourism and Art Museums,” *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38, n. 2 (2011): 403–21.

⁷⁵ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 24.

PHILOSOPHIES OF ARCHERY

Enea Bianchi

Abstract

This article investigates how different philosophical traditions and schools of thought have understood the practice and the discipline of archery. Whereas the scholarly literature on the history, the techniques and the uses of bows and arrows is diverse and extensive, my aim is to contribute to the less developed research on the relationship between philosophy and archery. Specifically, I will explore in what terms philosophers have employed the bow as a metaphor for both their standpoints and, more generally, significant aspects of everyday life.

Keywords

Archery; philosophy; everyday life; bow; arrow.

That I may one day be ready and ripe in the great noon; ready and ripe like glowing bronze, clouds pregnant with lightning and swelling udders of milk – ready for myself and for my most hidden will; a bow burning for its arrow, an arrow burning for its star.

Friedrich W. Nietzsche

1. Introduction: How Do Philosophers Understand Archery?

The origins of archery are lost to time. Archaeological finds and cave paintings demonstrate that in almost every corner of the planet the human being developed the techniques and tools to build and control a “bent stick” and use it as a weapon. Shooting a projectile – the arrow – with strength and from distance played a crucial role in hunting prey or predators, and thus contributed to the survival and the development of the human species.

At the same time, until the invention and spread of firearms, such as guns, pistols and rifles, the bow was employed by many civilisations in warfare with success. Depending on various factors such as availability of material, purpose and climate, heterogenous types of bows, techniques and construction methods emerged throughout the world: curved, short composite bows, made from a fusion of different materials such as wood, horn and sinew, employed by the civilisations and empires of Asia and the Middle East; simple bows, made of a single piece of wood, such as the yew longbow in the United Kingdom; short bows made of Osage orange wood in North and Central America, to name a very few.

Alongside hunting and warfare, archery has been part of the everyday life of the human being through contests, rituals, literature, mythology and philosophy. If the spread of firearms has made the bow obsolete for warfare and, partly, for hunting, nevertheless this weapon is still used today by hundreds of thousands of people all over the world in multiple contexts, such

as recreational and competitive activity, historical re-enactment, trick shooting and spiritual discipline. If we narrow the focus to competitive archery, we can appreciate disparate types and styles: hunting simulation with paths in the woods and 3D targets placed at unknown distances, including moving targets, uphill and downhill shots, limited times and in certain occurrences also negative scores if the arrows merely wound instead of killing; tournaments in which the archer always shoots at the same target from the same distance indoor or in an open field, like the Olympic games; and mixtures of the two. Going even deeper, with the same bow one can practice different shooting styles, from instinctive shooting to split vision, gap shooting, bow and peep sights... In short, one can easily get lost in the variegated universe of historical and contemporary archery. The topic is even larger and more complex than what I have just hinted at, but this article does not aim to investigate the history, the types, and uses of archery. The reader can already find a rich literature on these topics.¹

What I believe is lacking from the archery studies literature is an examination of how philosophers have dealt with it. Most of the scarce scholarly literature on philosophy and archery revolves around Confucius' teachings, the practice of kyudo, and the book *Zen and the Art of Archery* by Eugen Herrigel, in which the German philosopher reflects on his experience with the Japanese kyudo teacher Awa Kenzo.² My aim here is to expand this discussion by including further figures, such as the *Zhuangzi*, the *Daodejing*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Cicero, Heraclitus and Nietzsche. Starting from this article, my overall goal is to rekindle interest in how philosophers have understood and presently understand archery, hoping to ignite a discussion that will provoke further research and inquiry on the topic.

The common thread on which my analysis builds is based on one research question: in what terms have philosophers and thinkers understood archery?³ Through my analysis I will show that philosophers have predominantly referred to the bow and arrows as a metaphor for their philosophical systems, and yet this does not imply a detachment from the practical domain but, on the contrary, an attempt to articulate the human condition in its multiple aspects.⁴

This broad research question is informed and sharpened by another one: what is the goal of archery? This might appear a trivial question: is not the goal of archery to hit the target? For its very physical structure and its use over the millennia, is not the bow essentially a weapon that allows somebody to shoot a projectile in the direction of a given target? If this is true, we will see in this article how on a philosophical level alternative interpretations have been proposed regarding this claim. These interrogatives are tangent to other crucial issues for our everyday life, such as: why do we do what we do? Do we do it in sight of a result, to achieve a goal? Or ought/should we do it simply to do it, considering the goal as a by-product, or not even considering it at all? Ultimately this article aims at a reflection on the idea of action and agency through

the metaphor of the bow and arrows. If a significant pool of philosophers have focused on the definition of “action”, here the focus is restricted to those who have specifically pointed at archery as a key discipline to understand and become aware of different aspects of everyday life.

2. The Two Sides of Chinese Archery: The Rhythm of Nature and Political Authority

Beyond the archaeological evidence, primitive Chinese writing dating back to over 3500 years ago⁵ and early manifestations of folk and mythical tales show that archery is deeply rooted in the Chinese world. The first testimonies, handed down to us through fragments in later texts, illustrate that there was a close link between archery, magic and divination. To begin with, one of the most ancient and well-known legends on the topic is that of Yi the archer. There are numerous and heterogeneous fragments relating to the mythical deeds of this archer, from the poems of Qu Yuan to the *King of Huai Nan* and the *Shan Hai Jing*. These records represent works of the Chinese folklore especially belonging to the Western Zhou Dynasty (1027–771 BCE). One of them informs us that in a mythical past, at the dawn of time, the world was visited by monsters that inflicted misery upon Chinese population. Then an archer intervened to change the situation: “The Heavenly Emperor had pity on mankind, and so he gave his servant, the Archer Yi, a cinnabar-red bow and wooden fowling arrows with the power to defeat monsters”. As the interpreters have shown⁶, the supernatural monsters defeated by Yi, such as the “Ten Suns”, “Dafeng”, “Hebo” and others, are personifications of natural disasters. For example, the Ten Suns would represent a period of extreme drought, ceased thanks to the intervention of Yi who extinguished nine out of the ten suns with his bow; or also Dafeng, a stormy wind “destroyer of houses”, or Hebo, the Water Sprite who caused river inundations. On this topic this passage is worth quoting at length:

Further on his travels, Yi ventured into the land of the Water Sprite. Usually, the Water Sprite lived as a spirit at the bottom of the Great Yellow River. From time to time, however, he would rise from there, take on the form of a white dragon and menace the people of China with great floods. It so happened that at the time Yi was nearby, the Water Sprite had transformed itself into a white dragon and was ravaging the countryside. Yi immediately took up his great bow and fired, hitting the Water Sprite in the left eye. The Water Sprite was mortally wounded, and he called to the Heavenly Emperor, ‘Yi has wronged me! Kill him for me!’ The Heavenly Emperor asked, ‘How did you come to get shot?’ The Water Sprite replied, ‘I happened to be swimming in the guise of a white dragon.’ The Heavenly Emperor said, ‘I commanded you to patrol the depths of the spirit world. Had you done so, how would Yi have harmed you? But instead, you transformed yourself into

a wild beast. As such, mortals would be bound to shoot at you – what could be more natural? Can I really hold Yi to blame?’⁷

On a figurative level, the Water Sprite represents a river flooding that was taken care of by Yi. On a deeper and more ideological level, though, Yi mortally wounded not so much an evil and wandering spirit but a subordinate of the Heavenly Emperor himself. For this reason, the Water Sprite invokes the Emperor in search for vengeance. Nonetheless, the Emperor claims that Yi did nothing wrong insofar as the actual problem was the Water Sprite itself who was not carrying out his assigned task. This places Yi in an ambivalent position: on the one hand he is the one who restores order and balance, on the other hand he is also ready to kill someone who is directly under the authority of the Emperor.

Alongside this representation of the archer as the guarantor of imperial power and as the ruler of the elements, there is a more obscure and ambiguous one in the Chinese folklore. In fact, if we look at the *Book of Changes*, and generally speaking at the Zhou dynasty records (1046–256 BCE), we see that the bow is closely associated with divination and shamanism. Specifically, as Stephen Selby points out, both white and black magic go hand in hand with archery in Chinese folklore. For example, the Shang King Wu Yi, king of the Shang Dynasty from 1147 to 1112 BCE, once built a puppet figure and called it the “heavenly spirit”, and then competed with it in archery contests. Another time he built a leather sack containing blood, threw it in the air and ordered his archers to shoot their arrows. In this way from the blue of the sky the bag exploded in gushes of blood, as if heaven itself had been wounded by the arrows.⁸ This and other episodes also link archery to despotic rulers who challenge and outrage the cosmic order, by disregarding the discipline of heaven. It should be noted, however, that heaven in the Chinese tradition – as Hans-Georg Moeller suggests – does not involve the traditional western metaphysical conception of a world *beyond, after, or above* this world. It is instead “the course of celestial bodies and thus the course of the seasons and the course of time itself”.⁹ Thus, when the term ‘heaven’ (*tian*) is employed within the Chinese tradition of thought, it evokes the cyclical, natural and physical processes that constitute the functioning of the whole universe. Acting with what recalls the Greek *hybris* (insolence), the above-mentioned ruler believed himself above the “decree of Heaven”, which in turns can be understood as nature’s overall process of birth, decay, withering and death.¹⁰

To sum up, the archer in ancient Chinese folklore was an ambivalent figure: a friend of light and institutions but also a friend of darkness and occult practices. On one side the archer brings harmony and control, on the other disharmony and insolence. The power of the bow and arrows seems to be limitless – it is then up to the archer to weigh this power and choose their path, balancing between these opposites. Is not the bow itself a tensile structure based on the paradoxical co-presence of opposing forces, held together by a taut string? From these very first

fragments of the Zhou Dynasty folklore, archery involved at least two aspects that will then remain on a philosophical level: a) control over calamities which, by extension, implies the human dominion over the surrounding world, and b) the reinforcement of hierarchical power. The cosmic balance will influence the Daoist tradition more, and the political and social balance will have greater weight for the feudal one as well as for the Confucian.

Within the Daoist tradition, the two texts I am examining are the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. The former contains an explicit reference to the bow:

The way of *tian* [heaven] is like archers drawing their bows.

To hit something high in the air, they pull the string downward;

To hit something lower, they pull the string upward.

When they have drawn the string too far back, they let some go,

And when they have not drawn it far enough, they pull harder.¹¹

The bow is used in metaphorical terms to indicate the work of balancing the world. As noted by Moeller¹², like the wheel, the bow and the world operate according to a principle of reversal, a continuous movement in which what is high will be low, what is low will rise, to then return to the original state and start the whole process again. The wise archers know if they are pulling the string too much or not enough, and balance their shooting accordingly. Likewise, the Daoist sage follows the way of the bow, which implies an attunement with the surrounding world, nature, and the never-ending cycle of the elements. As heaven works to harmonize the imbalances of human fallibility, so the image of the drawn bow serves the *Daodejing* to show the aimless and spontaneous course of heaven. A crucial characteristic of this spontaneity can be detected in its cyclical and rhythmical agency: just like the reversing movement of the bow the Dao of heaven is constituted by a continuous interflow and exchange of opposites. Phenomena alternate and turn into their opposites, but the Daoist is conscious that this does not mean they are interchangeable entities where all differences are flattened out. On the contrary, it implies the awareness and the acceptance of this rhythmical sequence, including at a practical and everyday level. If everything is liable to turn into its opposite, this means that it is impossible to ascertain and know what is good or bad once and for all. To possess or not possess something we desire, to hit or miss the target, represent of course different and distinct happenings in our own lives. But what is at stake in the Daoist perspective is our judgement toward them. The Daoist's paradoxical conclusion is that we cannot judge if achieving or failing to achieve our goals is good or bad in itself, precisely because events transmute unceasingly and what is apparently bad luck can become its opposite.

The *Zhuangzi* contains more explicit references to bows and arrows. In several scenes, Yi the archer is the main character involved. Even the *Zhuangzi* highlights the ambivalence of this figure: while he was extremely gifted and technically talented in hitting any possible target, at the same time “he was clumsy in not preventing people from praising him for it”.¹³ Yi enables the *Zhuangzi* to define the place of the individuals and their relationship to heaven. If the archer Yi is skilled in the realm of humans, he instead is “clumsy” in that of heaven because in his search for recognition, fame and glory he is entangled by mere worldly concerns and can easily go off the tracks, as this quotation exemplifies:

When you’re betting tiles in an archery contest, you shoot with skills. When you’re betting for fancy belt buckles, you worry about your aim. And when you’re betting for real gold, you’re a nervous wreck. Your skill is the same in all three cases – but because one prize means more to you than another, you let outside considerations weigh on your mind. He who looks too hard at the outside gets clumsy on the inside.¹⁴

The *Zhuangzi* thus claims that being concerned too much about what happens “outside”, i.e. in the world, makes people clumsy “internally” – that is, towards the spiritual attunement between oneself and the natural order. The *Zhuangzi* also outlines the contrasting figure of the sage who, though in harmony with heaven, appears clumsy in the realm of humans. This is perhaps the typical and stereotyped image of the sage and the philosopher, who, completely absorbed in their own thoughts, does not watch their steps and falls on the ground. Finally, the *Zhuangzi* depicts a third figure, who synthesizes both the mundane and the heavenly aspects just outlined. This is the “complete man”¹⁵, who succeeds in encompassing both the ways of the world and the ways of heaven. This figure paradoxically “hates” the very distinction between man and heaven, since s/he believes that each distinction is asserted by the arbitrary and partial perspective of an “I”. The “I” is the all too human root of desire, beliefs and ideologies, to which the Daoist sage opposes a radical attitude of dehumanization and detachment. Although one can wonder if these beings have ever appeared on earth, it seems worth noting how this in-between condition has also been developed by heterogeneous traditions and schools of thought in the Western world, such as the schools of the Stoics and the Jesuits. For instance, the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine emphasised the crucial significance of a lifestyle in which the “I” disappears. Bellarmine devoted a treatise precisely to the idea that in order to live well, one must learn – so to speak – how to die while still living: “it is necessary, in the first place, that we die to the world before we die in the body”¹⁶. Not only, for Bellarmine, must one live well in order to have a good death – for him, the inverse is also true. Bellarmine claims that we can be *in* the world while at the same time not being *of* the world. A seemingly small change in prepositions hides a much more complex and subtle perspective. It implies the paradoxical

attitude of living as if nothing that we do, possess, or taste actually belongs to us – that is, a general indifference which enables the individual to be skilful in the mundane things of the world while at the same time avoiding being enslaved by them.

It seems then that for both the Daoists and the Jesuits, a crucial aspect of one's own liberation is first and foremost the liberation from the pressure of the ego. Nonetheless, a crucial difference lies in the fact that for the Daoists there is no "I" nor "other", whereas for the Jesuits the "I" is suspended precisely to make room for the utmost otherness, i. e. the will of God.

Another passage of the *Daodejing* can further develop the assertions made so far. While not explicitly referring to archery, this quotation tackles the same topic in a tangent way:

I really have three prized possessions that I cling to and treasure:

The first of these is compassion,

The second, frugality,

And the third is my reluctance to try to become preeminent in the world.¹⁷

These "prized possessions" consist in not being *of* the world while at the same time being *in* the world. If on the one hand it is essential to feel compassion towards others, to understand and face the reasons of poverty and misery, on the other hand it also is pivotal to step out from the ego-centred chain of desires. Like a boomerang, fame, competitiveness, coveting the first place and so on, seems to the Daoist a blind attitude: today's victory will be a defeat tomorrow.

Whoever hits the target aiming at ego-centred goals only achieves a pseudo-victory; on the other hand, whoever shoots while taking care only of the "inside" and disregards shooting technique, experience, and context is at the extreme opposite end of the spectrum: a clumsy sage detached from reality. The outlined traditions do not elaborate the doctrine of a powerless and impotent figure who despises everyday mundane life and considers it inferior to the pure and contemplative one. On the contrary, they should be considered philosophies of action, in which the first step to success lies precisely in practicing the abandonment of the ego, which equates success with victory and defeat with loss.

Alongside the Daoist perspective, literary evidence shows that several feudal states, starting from the Zhou period, linked archery to political and military authority through court rituals. From Zuo's *Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, to the *Book of Odes*, the *Record of Rituals*, and Confucius' *Analects*, just to mention the most famous examples, we can observe that archery was part of the moral and military education of young men. These rituals had two main objectives: on the one hand they implied the observance of codes of conduct, revolving on notions such as chivalry, respect, solemnity and appropriateness; on the other they were selection and evaluation processes in which the candidate court officials were ranked and chosen through their

archery performance.¹⁸ Confucius himself was an archer and held the discipline in high respect, including it in the “six arts” along with rites, music, charioteering, calligraphy and mathematics.¹⁹ Therefore, a first starting element can be grasped here: when Confucius and other commentators and ancient historians write about the bow and arrows, they do not mean hunting or warfare but a discipline inscribed in the moral framework of the ideal conduct of the noble man.

Concretely, archery was involved at the level of rituals which were primarily meant to evaluate members of the upper-class who wanted to pursue a career in the aristocratic and military hierarchies. Archery was a skill through which candidates were “tested” in the archery halls. Therefore, the archery ritual was a passage through which the gentleman’s ideal behavior was screened and assessed. As Rina Marie Camus summarizes, several criteria mattered most: “proper bearing, correct execution of standard steps, gracious movement, and keeping time with music”.²⁰ To put it briefly, the rituals involved complex and frequent bows, specific gestures towards certain directions, demonstrations of correct technique, movements in time to the music, and generally speaking the observance of ceremonial protocols and procedures. Detailed descriptions of these rituals can be found in Stephen Selby’s well-documented book *Chinese Archery*. Here I would like to underline the following aspect, which outlines the rituals’ ideological and authoritative framework:

In the schooling of the nobility in ancient China, music and ritual came together as a form of social indoctrination. [...] indoctrination was: educating the officials, timeliness in attending the ruler; adherence to the doctrines and not failing in duties. The aim of the education process was to round out skills and establish virtuous conduct. Skills assured national security, while virtuous conduct assured peaceful coexistence. Archery permitted these intangible qualities to be observed, and so we can regard it as the quality control test of the education system.²¹

In other words, respect of the protocols was equated to respect and observance of authority. This in turn would have promoted, according to the Confucian ideal, balance and harmony through the recognition of hierarchies and powers. Precisely because rituals involve a *display* of performances, codes of conduct and gestures, the purpose of the examiners was to check and assess the protocol observance through manners, etiquette and aesthetics. In Chinese archery rituals, the target to be hit is very remote and abstract. What matters is the respect shown for elaborate and formalized expressions of deference. This conclusion might open wider questions on the Confucian ideal of order, balance and peace within society, that is, a ritual perspective in which obedience was often performative and visual, but my aim here is to stress the point that, according to Confucian ritualism, the centre of the target is not so much the actual physical target as

the correct execution of the ceremony in the eyes of one's superiors. As Behuniak Jr argues, these types of rituals, which marked the pinnacle of aristocratic male education, were in fact intended to manifest the "thrust" of personal character.²² Thus, in the broader framework of Confucian philosophy, archery had a political and ethical target, since the cultivation of the ceremony and the rituals implied the willingness to act appropriately in order to fulfil one's role.

To conclude, both the Daoist and the feudal/Confucian ideal are developments of conceptions that can be traced back to the ancient Chinese folklore: on the one hand archery as a metaphor for the natural harmony, and on the other, the archer as an agent of political authority.

3. The Western Prejudice Against the Bow and Stoic Virtue

In the Greek world, cradle of Western civilization, the literary and folkloristic tradition on archery is also large and influential. However, as I will explain shortly, its influence has mainly consisted in a prejudice *against* the bow and arrows.

The Homeric poems contains abundant references to archery, as a recurrent weapon used both by mortals and deities. For instance, Apollo and his sister Artemis are associated with bows (Apollo known as the "lord of the shining bow"). The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus recounts the myths of Heracles and his bow, handed down to Philoctetes, and also of Apollo who "as the discoverer of the bow he taught the people of the land all about the use of the bow".²³ The figure of Ulysses also is surrounded by references to archery. He names his son Telemachus, translatable as "far fighter", that is, he who fights from afar. In addition, in at least two occurrences during and after the Trojan war the bow plays a crucial role, not to mention the killing of Achilles by Paris through an arrow that hit his vulnerable heel. First, when he and Neoptolemus try to relinquish Philoctetes' bow in the belief that it will help them winning the war. Here Philoctetes tells Neoptolemus "By capturing my bow (*bios*) you have unstrung my life (*bios*). / Give it me back, I beg you, give it back, I say. / By your ancestral gods, do not, my son, deprive me of my bow, my life [*bios*]"²⁴ Sophocles plays with the ambiguity of the word *bios*, meaning both 'life' and 'bow' in archaic Greek, to underline how the bow is essential for Philoctetes life. Second, in the 21st book of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus participates in an archery contest in order to win back his wife Penelope, with the bow signifying not only hierarchical leadership but also a *demand* of recognition to the other, in this case Penelope.²⁵

However, as Caroline Sutherland notes,²⁶ the bow in the Greek mythology – especially when used by mortals – is above all a symbol of cowardice, treachery and lack of honor. Killing with the bow seems to have been condemned for a couple of reasons. On the one hand, it was seen as a breach in the heroic code, under which warriors ought to fight "honorably" in hand-to-hand combat. On the other hand, those who influence the earth from afar are the gods

themselves, and perhaps mortal archers were thought to be moved by *hybris*, the insolence/arrogance of imitating somebody who is inimitable.

This suspicion toward archery is detectable not only in the Greek world, both from a cultural and a military perspective (at least in classical Greece, hoplite infantry was prominent), but also in the Roman one and broadly speaking in the whole of the Western tradition. Those who sowed terror through the massive use of archers, especially on horseback, were precisely the sworn enemies of the Greeks and Romans: the Persians and the Parthians. This diffidence towards archery led the Western world to a long-lived prejudice against it that endured throughout the following centuries. As noted by Giovanni Amatuccio,²⁷ in the West the nobility has always had a bias against the bow and archers: the wealthy possessed expensive swords and armour, peasants and farmers cheaper armaments such as bows and arrows. The nobles used it as a recreational pastime,²⁸ for instance in hunting, but the legendary medieval English longbow, which made a crucial contribution in several battles such as those of Crécy in 1346 and Agincourt in 1425, was above all a mass and popular weapon, rather than a high-ranking one. This has had repercussions not only from a historiographical point of view but also from a theoretical and literary one. Legends such as *The Knights of the Round Table* are mainly populated by sword knights of royal, noble or aristocrat lineage. The Middle Ages especially feature the sword as the most coveted weapon: Excalibur, Durendal, Hruntin, just to name a few. Conversely, the figure who is most associated with archery is Robin Hood, an impoverished noble who becomes an outlaw, partisan of the lower class, with the bow figuring above all as a hunting weapon used for sustenance.

Therefore, if – broadly speaking – in the Asian continent an ancient, philosophical and political tradition is linked to archery, in the European context we have to wait until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries for this situation to start changing, with the anonymous treatise written in French *L'art d'archerie* and the English *Toxophilus* by Roger Ascham.²⁹ Nevertheless, some philosophers both in the Greek and in the Roman environments focused on archery, especially in order to exemplify their ideals of virtue and good life. For instance, at the beginning of his *Nicomachean Ethics*³⁰ Aristotle clarifies the object of his study by comparing the ethical person to the archer, both sharing the goal of aiming for a target, whether it is a physical one for the archer or a spiritual one for the ethicists. Here, however, I will focus on Cicero's Stoicism by drawing a parallel between his thought and the Hindu scripture of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, before, in the final section, juxtaposing Heraclitus' fragments on archery with Nietzsche's philosophy.

In *On Moral Ends*, Cicero, through the mouth of Cato the Elder, expresses the following in order to refute the sceptical claims of Carneades:

Take the case of one whose task it is to shoot a spear or arrow straight at some target. One's ultimate aim is to do all in one's power to shoot straight, and the same applies with

our ultimate good. In this kind of example, it is to shoot straight that one must do all one can; none the less, it is to do all one can to accomplish the task that is really the ultimate aim. It is just the same with what we call the supreme good in life.³¹

This passage exemplifies Cicero's Stoic view on virtue through the technique of bow shooting. The goal of archery would lie not so much in hitting the target but in "shooting straight". Significantly to "shoot straight" is also one of the fundamental aspect of the practice of archery according to Ascham's *Toxophilus*, and in contemporary tournaments archers often wish each other good luck by using this expression. What all these heterogeneous occurrences of "shoot straight" share – I believe – is the focus on the *action* rather than the result, or, in other words, the idea that archers should do their best to perform the gesture correctly without getting distracted by the point of impact of the arrow. Once the arrow is released, it is no longer the archer's business – all manner of external factors might intervene, and a good and well performed shot can still end up missing the target. Still, the archer's job is to focus on the process, on the flow, on the fluidity of the movements. This of course does not mean that the archer is not responsible for their shot, but that once the goal is set and the action is performed, their mind should become indifferent whether the arrow hits or misses that very goal (in this indifference possibly lies one of the most difficult tasks for competitors).

This attitude provides an example of the Stoic worldview and hints at their conception of virtuous action. Virtue, for the Stoics, consists in understanding what they called *Logos*, or reason, which is the ordering principle of reality. To some extent similar to Laozi's Dao, the *Logos* permeates the world and orders the cosmos. Inside this theoretical framework, the aims and goals of our small egos should be de-centred and re-centred according to an accurate assessment of what is up to us and what is not. Hence, according to their philosophy, individuals should be concerned only by what is under their power, and should therefore be able to distinguish what falls within or outside of their control. For instance, a man can live the healthiest possible life, exercise every day and eat well, and yet he can get involved in an accident or get sick anyway. The unpleasant or pleasant outcomes of our actions do not ultimately depend on us and should not therefore be the main goal of our lives. On the contrary, indifference is the key term: "And if it is about one of the things that is not up to us, be ready to say, 'You are nothing in relation to me'".³² The archer can train patiently, take care of their equipment and develop a spontaneous and fluid technique: their arrow may still miss the bull's eye or even the target completely.

This experience also emerges in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, a 700-verse scripture, part of the epic *Mahabharata*, which is considered one of the highest points of Hindu religious tradition. The action takes place before the decisive battle between two rival families, the just Pandavas and the usurping Kauravas. Specifically, the Pandavas' prince and general Arjuna feels

overwhelmed imagining the massive loss of life that will result if the battle takes place, and asks Krishna for guidance. The discussion between the two covers fundamental concepts such as *yoga*, *karma* and *brahman*. Significantly, the distinction between aims and goals recurs: Arjuna, the most gifted and talented archer, is faced with the dilemma of the consequences of his actions. Without descending into the ethical perspective that emerges from the text, I would like to bring to the attention of the reader the following short extracts:

He who, having totally given up attachment to actions and their fruit, no longer depends on anything in the world, and is ever content, does nothing at all, though fully engaged in action. [...] The Karmayogi, who is contented with whatever is got unsought, is free from jealousy and has transcended all pairs of opposites like joy and grief, and is balanced in success and failure, is not bound by his action.³³

These passages align with the claims developed so far in this article. Like the Daoist, the Jesuit and the Stoic, the Karmayogi is “fully engaged” in the world but at the same time s/he is not *of* the world. This does not mean that these figures are not capable of recognizing a gain from a loss, or a victory from a defeat. The main issue concerns the problem of action. If we do not act, we deny life itself; we are therefore forced to act. But how? According to the *Gītā* there is a way, and it consists in acting without representing the fruit, that is, without being bound by results and consequences. This agency arises beyond success and reward and is independent of one’s self. Interestingly, a link is also detectable in the *Gītā* that connects effectiveness and indifference. In order to succeed, one has to act counterintuitively through a selfless agency. In the highlighted passage of the *Gītā* this appears clearly: it is not a matter of focusing on the self, but the contrary, of being/becoming a means, an instrument, an intermediary of the world. By downsizing oneself one makes room for the world: indifference makes the difference of history possible. It describes a radical de-subjectivization whereby one’s ego is suspended and the world in its multifarious manifestations is opened.

4. Facing Adversity: Heraclitus and Nietzsche

The schools of thought examined so far show – among other things – a sensitivity to the notion of *opposition*. In this final section I explore this very idea in the reflections of Heraclitus and Nietzsche. Again, the bow will be our key guide and metaphor. Let us start with Heraclitus’ fragments:

They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement [or fitting together] turning back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre. [...] The name of the bow is life; its work is death.³⁴

These enigmatic aphorisms should be understood within the broader framework of Heraclitean cosmology. Heraclitus ponders the bow as a metaphor exemplifying his whole worldview. The bow and the lyre are examples of how harmony and balance can emerge by way of a state of tension that holds together the forces at play: the string that stretches and flexes the bow; the taut strings of the lyre that produce notes and chords. It should also be said that – as Heidegger reminds us³⁵ – the bow and the lyre are the two signs of Artemis, Apollo’s sister, goddess of emergence, light and play who at the same time brings death. Humans “do not comprehend” the underlying principles of things, namely the harmony produced by opposites. In the first aphorism, this harmony can be found in the tension of the bow at full draw, in which two opposite tendencies are present at the same time: the archer’s arms pull in opposite directions, one hand pushing the bow in one direction while the other draws the string in the opposite. For Heraclitus, this exemplifies the general principle of opposition, in which a system of tensions, even conflict, contributes to the realization of a unity: harmony as an “intelligent structure or purposeful activity, a unified whole whose essential parts (or stages or tendencies) are related to one another by polar contrast”.³⁶ Understanding the functioning of the bow, and above all the principles it represents, would help humans to understand and more vividly recognize the world as a unity comprised of parts in perennial conflict. On top of that, Heraclitus plays on the homonymy between the archaic Greek word bow (*bios*) and life (*bios*), and highlights its paradox: the arrow is what hits and kills, but the weapon that throws it has the same name as life. On the one hand the killing of the prey or the enemy in war, on the other hand the survival of the archer and the individuals s/he represents. Here, too, one of the Archimedean points of his philosophical style emerges: not just the unceasing conflict, but the coexistence and co-presence of opposites. And, yet, precisely this coexistence of contradicting instances is the unifying structure of the cosmos. But more specifically Heraclitus meant the most profound connection that links life and death, as indicated in other aphorisms.

The co-presence of opposites can also be detected in Nietzsche’s philosophy. The German philosopher, too, uses the metaphor of the bow to describe it:

The essential point is: the greatest perhaps also possess great virtues, but in that case also their opposites. I believe that it is precisely through the presence of opposites and the feelings they occasion that the great man, the bow with the great tension, develops.³⁷

Beware! The time approaches when human beings no longer launch the arrow of their longing beyond the human, and the string of their bow will have forgotten how to whirl! I say to you: one must still have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star. I say to you: you still have chaos in you.³⁸

These passages connect the image of the bow with the idea of inner tension, and especially the projectile-like movement of self-overcoming. To clarify this central Nietzschean idea it is useful to briefly examine the chapter “On the Teachers of Virtue” from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where the figure of the wise man of virtues is outlined. To sum up, the wise man claims that the true lord of virtue is sleep, as it represents a proper test to virtue itself: “if the virtuous man achieved a conciliated mind before bedtime, he will thus be reconciled with sleep and will have a peaceful and sound night; Ten times you must reconcile yourself again with yourself, for overcoming causes bitterness and the unreconciled sleep badly”. In order not to inflame one’s own spleen, one must always – the wise man continues – honour authority, be at peace with God and the neighbours, practice obedience and so on. In order to sleep well, one must live according to “poppy-blossomed virtues”,³⁹ which in turns means for Nietzsche that one exchanges sound sleep for a life with its engines switched off. In addition, it is not just everyday life which – for Nietzsche – is infected by this attitude, it is also the very idea of sleep, because in turn this lifestyle promotes a “sleep without dreams” – that is, a sleep in which the repressed content never returns. Here the tension of the bow comes into play: for Nietzsche only the “last man” can think that life is reconciliation and sleep without dreams, while the great man, “the bow with the greatest tension”, arises “through the presence of the opposites and the feelings they occasion”. Therefore, a central issue lies in the way in which the problem of the opposite is experienced in one’s own lifestyle: the opiate-virtuous man resolves every contrast in a final harmony; the great man, the free spirit, acts beyond all conciliations. Zarathustra criticises the wise man because he has a decadent, reactive, contemplative vision of existence. The wise man teaches that happiness can be obtained cheaply by living with a clean conscience at the end of the day, and that what matters most is ultimately the well-being of one’s corner. In so doing sleep, lord of virtues, grants its gifts. On this topic, according to Meyer, Nietzsche’s aphorism should also be understood as the sublimation and the release of our drives outwards instead of letting them stagnate inward, which would then generate *ressentiment*.⁴⁰ Archery would teach us, among the other things, that in facing adversities there are always potential outcomes leading the subject to repression and violence, and that it is our effort to sublimate them through creative energy into something beyond ourselves. Nietzsche, Heraclitus, and the other thinkers investigated in this article, invite us to deal with, face, and challenge these tensions – even to aestheticize them. The individual’s task is therefore to reintroduce the tension in the bow, to put the string back on it, to embrace their own tensions and accept them as an inherent aspect of everyday life since the dawn of mankind.

- ¹ See for instance: Waldorf, D.C., 1985, *The Art of Making Primitive Bows and Arrows*, Mound Builder Books, Ohio; Latham, J.D., Paterson, W.F., 1970, *Saracen Archery*, The Holland Press, London; Klopsteg, P.E., 1987, *Turkish Archery*, Simon Archery Foundation, Manchester; Soar, H., 2009, *The Crooked Stick: a History of the Longbow*, Westholme, Pennsylvania; Loades, M., 2019, *War Bows*, Osprey, Oxford; Wadge, R., 2012, *Archery in Medieval England*, The History Press, Cheltenham; Laubin, R., Laubin, G., 1980, *American Indian Archery*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman; Hill, H., 2000, *Hunting the Hard Way*, Derrydale Press, New York; Onuma, H., 1993, *Kyudo. The Essence and Practice of Japanese Archery*, Kodansha International, Tokyo / New York; Grayson, C.E., French, M., O'Brien, M.J., 2007, *Traditional Archery from Six Continents*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London; Amatuccio, G., 1996, *Peri Toxias*, Planetario, Bologna; Cenni, A., 1997, *L'arco e gli arcieri nell'Italia medievale*, Greentime, Bologna. See also the issues of *The Journal of the Society of Archer-Antiquaries*.
- ² On this topic, see also: Shōji, Y., 2016, "The Myth of Zen in the Art of Archery", in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 28, 1-30. Interestingly, Shōji claims that Herrigel's famous account of Kenzo's teachings might be biased by coincidental circumstances and linguistic misunderstanding, upon which the German philosopher built his mythical and mystical understanding of Japanese-ness in the realm of archery.
- ³ Although we should keep in mind that the label of "philosopher" *stricto sensu* does not fully apply to non-Western thinkers and figures.
- ⁴ On this topic, also see Matthew P. Meyer's insightful and original contribution to a psychoanalytic understanding of archery titled *Archery and the Human Condition in Lacan, the Greeks and Nietzsche*, Lexington Books, London, 2020.
- ⁵ See Selby, S., 2003, *Chinese Archery*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong; J. Tian, J. Ma, 2014, *The Way of Archery. A 1637 Chinese Military Training Manual*, Schiffer, Atglen (PA).
- ⁶ See the first four chapters of Selby, S., 2003, *Chinese Archery*.
- ⁷ Quoted in Selby, S., 2003, *Chinese Archery*, 18.
- ⁸ See Selby, S., 2003, *Chinese Archery*, 39.
- ⁹ Moeller, H.-G., 2006, *The Philosophy of the Daodejing*, Columbia University Press, New York, 17-18.
- ¹⁰ These episodes from ancient folklore may remind us of the scourging of the strait of Dardanelles (also known as the Hellespont) by Xerxes, when the Persian king had the water whipped by his soldiers, "guilty" of having destroyed the bridge that was meant to allow his army to cross.
- ¹¹ Laozi, 2003, *Daodejing. A Philosophical Translation*, Ballantine Books, New York, eBook, Chapter 77.
- ¹² Moeller, H.-G., 2006, *The Philosophy of the Daodejing*, 47-48.
- ¹³ Zhuangzi, 2013, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, Columbia University Press, New York, eBook edition, Chapter 23.
- ¹⁴ Zhuangzi, 2013, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, Chapter 19.
- ¹⁵ Zhuangzi, 2013, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, Chapter 23.
- ¹⁶ Bellarmine, R., 2016, "The Art of Dying Well." In *Saint Robert Bellarmine. Collection*, Aeterna Press, Kindle eBook.
- ¹⁷ Laozi, 2008, *Daodejing. A Philosophical Translation*, Chapter 67.
- ¹⁸ Several articles and book chapters have been written on this perspective on archery. See for instance: Behuniak Jr, J., 2010, "Hitting the Mark: Archery and Ethics in Early Confucianism", in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 37, 4, 588-604; Camus, R.M., 2017, "Comparison by Metaphor: Archery in Confucius and Aristotle", in *Dao*, 16, 165-185; Selby, S., 2003, *Chinese Archery*, Chapters 4 and 5.
- ¹⁹ See Confucius, 2003, *Analects*, Hackett, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 3.
- ²⁰ Camus, R.M., "Comparison by Metaphor", 172.
- ²¹ Selby, S., 2003, *Chinese Archery*, 79-80.
- ²² Behuniak Jr, J., 2010, "Hitting the Mark", 590.
- ²³ Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, Book V, 47-84, https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/e/roman/texts/diodorus_siculus/5d*.html, last accessed 2 July 2021.
- ²⁴ Sophocles, 2015, *Oedipus the King and Other Tragedies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 186.
- ²⁵ Meyer, M.P., 2020, *Archery and the Human Condition in Lacan, the Greeks and Nietzsche*, Lexington Books, London.
- ²⁶ Sutherland, C., 2001, "Archery in the Homeric Epics", in *Classics Ireland*, 8, 111-120.
- ²⁷ Amatuccio, G., 2010, *Gli arcieri e la guerra nel Medioevo. Bisanzio, Islam, Europa*, Greentime, Bologna, 157.
- ²⁸ Contrarily to the Indian tradition – among several other ones – where bows and arrows are considered quintessential royal weapons. See also Coomaraswamy, A.K., 1943, "The Symbolism of Archery", in *Ars Islamica*, Vol. 10, 105-119.
- ²⁹ Ascham, R., 2015, *Toxophilus: 1545*, Leopold Classic Library, Victoria, Australia. Again, this conclusion does not apply to the rich and heterogeneous schools and traditions of the Asian continent, not only China, Japan, India and the nomadic tribes of Central Asia, but also the Middle East. In fact, this area witnessed civilisations and cultures (such as the Byzantine and the Ottoman empires, the Saracens and the Mamelukes) where archery played a central role, especially in war but also from a religious and spiritual perspective (there are about forty *Hadit* which report Muhammad's perspective on archery).
- ³⁰ Aristotle, 2009, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 3.
- ³¹ Cicero, 2004, *On Moral Ends*, Cambridge University press, Cambridge, 72.
- ³² Epictetus, 1983, *Handbook*, Hackett, Indianapolis, § 1.
- ³³ *The Bhagavadgītā*, 2008, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 63-64.
- ³⁴ Heraclitus quoted in Kahn, C.H., 1979, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 65. As stated above, the ancient term for 'bow' was 'bios', which was a homophone for the word for 'life' (they differ in the accent, which in Heraclitus' time was not used).
- ³⁵ Heidegger, M., 2018, *Heraclitus. The Inception of Occidental Thinking*, Bloomsbury, London / New York, 14.
- ³⁶ Kahn, C.H., 1979, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 200.

³⁷ Nietzsche, F.W., 1968, *The Will to Power*, Vintage Books, New York, 507.

³⁸ Nietzsche, F.W., 2006, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 9.

³⁹ Nietzsche, F.W., 2006, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 19.

⁴⁰ Meyer, M.P., *Archery and the Human Condition*, 177.

CHALLENGING EVERYDAYS: ON PRECARITY IN EVERYDAY AESTHETICS

Petteri Enroth

Abstract

Everyday aesthetics, as the name says, is largely justified by its social, demographic and experiential scope. I attempt to add to this scope by taking up the category of precarity, heretofore unaddressed in the field, and considering how this socio-economic position might affect the aesthetic character of daily life. Specifically, I will discuss its implications in the context of the debate between what Thomas Leddy has described as the “expansionist” and “restrictivist” positions over what constitutes “everydayness”. After briefly reviewing the discussion, I will argue that a life of precarity undermines the restrictivist definition of everydayness as something unnoticed and background-like; and that expansive approaches should work more toward including the kinds of dissonances and negativities that precarity entails. I also illustrate the experience of precarity by considering it as a specific relationship to temporality, especially future time. To these aims, I refer to my long-time personal experiences of precarity. The category is not easy to approach, but might be best grasped through the lens of aesthetic research on atmosphere. Such effort must be undertaken since precarity defines the position and experience of an increasing amount of people, contributing to great differences in the reality principles of different generations and social strata. On a more general level, this article is meant to encourage everyday aestheticians to be more aware of social and material factors for their object of study.

Keywords

Precarity, temporality, expansionism, restrictivism.

"We must rid ourselves of the delusion that it is the major events which determine us the most. We are much more deeply and continuously influenced by the tiny catastrophes that make up daily life."

Siegfried Kracauer, 1929¹

1. Introduction

In April 2019, I began preparing my slides for a course at a university dealing with different ways to apply branches of philosophical aesthetics. The field of everyday aesthetics was obviously on the menu, but upon revising my PowerPoints, I plunged into serious reflection on both some recent feedback from students and my own developing feelings about the slightly abstract nature of the discussion in the field. Broadly, this reservation has to do with the apparent lack of societal and material context of the experiencing subjects in the literature: regarding truly quotidian life and everydayness, students have sometimes made notes along the lines that the discussion sounds a lot like tenured academics comparing their privately owned homes, full-time jobs and cathartic free-time.

The view is a bit cruel, but I can understand the impression: heretofore research in the field does not really provide much to those (academics, students or others) whose experience of

the everyday is not structured as financially and/or culturally middle-class, or in terms of safety, evident prospects, satisfying relationships to labour and a freedom of choice – or cis-gendered, white, neurotypical, or able-bodied. It is blatantly obvious how such factors affect things that everyday aesthetics is about. Especially financial issues and structural changes in the labour “market” have been broadly definitive for the millennial and gen z generations’ life experience in the form of, for example, zero-hour contracts, platforming of work, the gig economy and the gap between low-wage sector salaries and costs of living.

In this paper, I will consider the negative effects that the position of precarity has on everyday aesthetic experience. Based on a meta-take of previous research on precarity, David Neilson writes: “Existential anxiety, understood as mental unease induced by the self-reflexive perception of life’s precarious character, is intensified by the reality of deepening social and material precarity. In contrast, everyday trust in the continuity of life or ontological security is encouraged by circumstantial security.”² My article, then, concerns the relationship of this deepened existential anxiety to the experience of everydayness and its aesthetic dimensions. Precarity has unique and peculiar experiential characteristics that deeply affect both routines and habits as well as conscious aesthetic experience through unease, dissonance and negativity. This potential as such is not a revelatory point, and it can be deduced from research into elements that define precarity, like financial strain, insecurity, anxiety, shame and lack of hope, which demonstrates that such factors make people less intelligent, less creative, less sociable and amicable, more prone to psychiatric morbidity, less likely to engage in their communities and environments and so on.³ Again, relevant questions for everyday aesthetics concern things like how does precarity challenge the current views on everydayness, and what kinds of modulations in the sphere of sensory, affective and aesthetic experience it causes.

I will here focus on precarity as constantly struggling and strategizing to “get by” financially, but three notes are in place. First, it is obvious that even a Western precarious existence most probably looks like a (middle-class) safe haven for e. g. someone living in a refugee camp, or the homeless people living their lives around my neighbourhood. Second, there is precarity, as it were, above the income-level of getting by; for instance, having enough money for living but not enough for a medical treatment or being eligible to adopt a child. Lastly, the broader aim of this paper is not simply to have everyday aestheticians include precarity in their research, but in general to pay more attention to the social and material contexts that define the everyday under scrutiny. My paper, then, is also meant to serve as an example of what such a shift might mean.

I will situate my argument in relation to the debate in everyday aesthetics between what Thomas Leddy has described as “expansionist” and “restrictivist” scholars as I believe this will serve to structure and contextualize my points.⁴ Since Leddy’s conceptualization is not

universally established, I will first take a look at its basic tenets and explain the reasoning behind the two terms; for the moment, suffice it to say that Leddy's distinction is based on whether philosophical accounts of everydayness focus more on its unnoticed humdrum (as with e.g. "restrictivists" Arto Haapala and Ossi Naukkarinen) or its more consciously appreciated features (like in e.g. "expansionists" Kalle Puolakka and Leddy himself). I realize that something might be lost in such departmentalisations, as Frederick Johannes Potgieter has pointed out⁵, but to me Leddy's structuring seems well grounded and provides a good framework for illustrating my argument and its relevance for the broader context of everyday aesthetics. I hope that my presentation of the relevant scholars is not too unfair, although space is of course limited.

Although the difference in perspective between these two "sides" is significant, both have largely focused on the aesthetic as something pleasurable and positive, or at least harmless. I claim that the negative effects of precarity amount to a situation where the space of unnoticed humdrum – an all-important, stabilizing and enabling feature of everydayness – diminishes as experience of uncertainty strengthens. This unnoticed background is then replaced by forcefully conscious participation in the quotidian life of routine. In short, the everyday begins to force itself upon one's consciousness, makes one pay attention on things that people in other social/material positions are spontaneously able to not pay attention to. Hence, I argue that precarity undermines the restrictivists' view of everydayness as *necessarily* unnoticed: there can be habituality that is mechanically, reluctantly noticed and existentially alienated. At the same time, however, the *importance* of a background-like everydayness is highlighted: the precarious subject would like nothing more. Again, an expansionist perspective might be better suited to describe societal and material positions like precarity, but this will demand conceptual labour as so far there has been an emphasis on positive aspects of everydayness.

In the second chapter, I discuss this phenomenon of forced attention in the context of temporality, more specifically the experience of future time, in everydayness. So far, the issue has not really been raised in everyday aesthetics, which amounts to a situation where the everyday is defined by a self-evidentially safe position of a subject regarding its future. To counter this, I mobilize the huge weight that already Heidegger placed on future temporality. Precarity, I argue, brings the future to bear on a subject's consciousness, and makes the future appear more a menace than anything else.

Among the effects of forced attention, including the pressuring presence of time, I count a predisposition to mechanic and alienated habituality; instrumentalizing one's sensuous surroundings, even thoughts and experiences ("How will this or that help me get by or move forward?"); an aesthetic inclination toward escapist experiences, where a grounding motivation for aesthetic activity is to form bubbles of the "now"; and aesthetic experiences that are coloured by negativity as

one's unsatisfying, even desperate, material and existential situation becomes part of the experience's genesis. Let it be noted that individual differences are not lost on me: e. g. some people are hard-wired in ways that make them more readily able to deal with uncertainties than others. I am not, then, claiming that my descriptions apply to every precarian worker in the same way. I am simply attempting to open up a discourse around the social-material phenomenon.

I will now move on to lay out the expansionist/restrictivist debate as conceptualized by Leddy, and then consider how the phenomenon of precarity challenges the way these positions represent the concept of the everyday.

2. The Nagging Presence of the Everyday

In 2015, Thomas Leddy described what he considers an opposite pole to his own "expansionist" everyday aesthetics as "restrictivism". The difference between the two positions concerns the character of everyday lived experience: the basic, necessary features of embodied existence and (possible) meaning(s) of "the aesthetic" within the everyday. For Leddy, most everyday aestheticians are restrictivists. He names Kevin Melchionne, Yuriko Saito, Arto Haapala and Ossi Naukkarinen. Of these, I will concentrate on the latter two. (Again, I would problematize Saito's inclusion in this list, but this is a matter too broad to be properly dealt with here; I will briefly bring it up at the end of this chapter.) The common factor per Leddy is that restrictivists "stress the ordinariness of the ordinary"⁶. They claim that the everyday should be appreciated and studied on its own terms because the aesthetic quality it entails differs essentially and definitively from that of the world of art and other modes of contemplative, extraordinary, engaged and other such conscious experience. These scholars would "restrict" discourse on reflective, conscious experiences to other branches of aesthetics and highlight the characteristics that make everydayness truly distinct from them: routines, functions and habits, which are more or less unnoticed, as when sitting in one's regular café or walking a familiar route. Fransisca Pérez-Carreño nicely captures the essence of the restrictivist stance when she says that everyday aesthetics deals with "the aesthetic character of the non-aesthetic."⁷

It is crucial to emphasize that for restrictivists the sphere of unnoticed routines and habits is a necessary and therefore defining facet of everydayness. Arto Haapala, for instance, has mobilized Heidegger's famous analysis of using a tool to make this point. For Haapala, the tool-character is the most basic character of the things we deal with in our everyday life – specifically built environments, as they are essentially places that we use⁸. Like Heidegger's tool, their primary way of appearing to us is through functionality and usefulness, to which they gradually disappear to become "backgrounds" instead of consciously recognized things.⁹ The main feature of the everyday, then, is that it doesn't bother us as the sensing, bodily beings that we are, and thereby

supports us: my home has no draft, my chair is comfy, my laptop works smoothly, so I do not notice them, and they provide me with the silent pleasure of familiarity, continuity and autonomy. To take another example of the philosophical grounding of the restrictivist stance, Ossi Naukkarinen construes his view from a more explicitly pragmatist perspective. He, like Haapala, underscores that everydayness is not about specific objects, actions or environments, but is a relational concept. Contents may change, but the relationship of everydayness, which Naukkarinen defines in terms of John Dewey's concept of habits, does not, and only such unnoticed habituality can be said to define everydayness. Therefore, we should direct our philosophical attention to "something that does not stick out from the mat of normalcy but supports the routine"¹⁰, or to "features such as normalcy, routine, repetition, habituality, and ordinariness."¹¹

Leddy himself wrote his book *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*¹² partly as a reaction against what he considered a trend in the field.¹³ He emphasizes the aesthetic continuities between art, nature and the everyday, hence "expanding" older discourses into the territory of everydayness, and considers conscious aesthetic judgements like "neat", "cute", "messy" and "lovely". Many aestheticians of course emphasize positive continuities between art and everyday life¹⁴, but Kalle Puolakka has been perhaps most explicit and programmatic in joining Leddy. Puolakka has countered the restrictivist standpoint by arguing that unnoticed ordinariness and habituality are not necessary for day-to-day life. He makes this point interestingly by noting that, although we naturally need habits in order to function at all, Dewey's concept of habit does not consist of, or even necessitate, the smooth and sound functioning of a barely noticed everyday. Puolakka reminds that Dewey views habits as pretty much "value-neutral" things, that is, they are in and of themselves simply necessary for life and do not contain any inherent quality for better or for worse.¹⁵ Puolakka's conclusion is that there "is no intrinsic reason why the experiences had in connection with habits would ... be low-key and almost imperceptible", that habits have a great variety of "range and content", and that, for example, it

*is perfectly possible to appreciate the design excellence of a pen while writing and the comfort of a shoe while walking. This does not even require any sort of laborious multitasking or division of attention. As the appreciation of design objects is tightly incorporated into everyday activity, the experience of their excellence and beauty can be very much part of everyday life.*¹⁶

In short, the kind of everydayness that the restrictivists talk about might be one form of habituality and the flow of life, but it is not a necessity. As a full-fledged example of this, Puolakka has posed the question 'Does Valery Gergiev Have an Everyday?' and answered in the negative due to the non-repetitive flow of the constantly travelling conductor's daily life.¹⁷

How would precarity, as more or less constant worry and alertness about income and social and material resources, relate to the framework presented? First, I claim that it definitely undermines the kind of almost transcendental necessity of unnoticeability that aestheticians like Haapala and Naukkarinen equate with everydayness. The reasons for this are similar but not the same as with the case of Gergiev presented by Puolakka: in a position of precarity, the space of unnoticed functions, cosy habits, and of things disappearing into their usefulness can be virtually eliminated, not because of the objective multiplicity of daily life, but because of a forced attention to this life – no matter how repetitive, habitual and mundane on the face of it. Precarity, then, is an everyday relational position that is at odds with the relational definition of everydayness of the restrictivists. To add a downside to Puolakka’s formulation: it is perfectly possible to be consciously listless, anxious and averse about the routines one is carrying out, and this, I claim, is a relation that precarity induces.

Ossi Naukkarinen in fact illustrates this blind spot of restrictivism when he says that “it can happen for various reasons that one’s daily life is full of anxiety and despair. ... In such cases one probably cannot say that such people have an everyday life in the same sense as most of us. They live in a crisis.”¹⁸ The problem with this view is not to call a life-situation of anxiety and despair a “crisis”, but to pose it as a binary alternative, an exception to a rule. This is not something that a field called everyday aesthetics should do. Although despair is sometimes perhaps a strong word to describe precariousness, the latter would still, in Naukkarinen’s terms, face the same discursive fate of marginalization. Again, Haapala recognizes that urban dwellers do encounter strangeness in their everyday lives, but that this is first and foremost something that mobilizes people to create familiarity and safety.¹⁹ In the light of my argument here, strangeness has a more perennial and obstructing quality in the context of precarity.

What, then, is the precarious experience like more specifically? There are, of course, individual differences, but from long-time personal experience, I would say that it can simply mean that very few things, if anything, appear as providing a sense of safety, familiarity and an autonomy-enabling background-ness. Under conditions of social-economic precarity with its uncertainty, threat, lack of prospects, even hopelessness etc., things might be *recognized* as familiar and functional, and habits may have the lead of one’s actions, but things don’t really settle and become the background to gain the care-free, quasi-conscious existence of the restrictivists’ vision. For example, coming home can simply be an experience of having arrived within these walls furnished with these and those things. The site doesn’t retreat into the background but may rather be a place of tension, struggle, obtrusion and scattered, restless attention – mainly due to the existentially relational quality of precarity, but sometimes also because e.g. one’s landlord is capricious, or the place itself is not really a home but more a three-dimensional space one

could afford, possibly with an inconsiderate roommate or two with boundary issues. If this kind of situation drags on long enough, one might in some ways get used to it, but it never dissolves into an unnoticed, autonomy-enabling support structure. Rather, it simply amalgamates into one's experience of how things are; the habitat is now that much less a place of rest and detachment, and that much more occupied by anxieties and scatter-brained being. It could be said that, in this kind of situation, Haapala's "tools for living" become rather mere things, and one uses them because one doesn't really have a choice; it is not the tool that is broken, but the life-context of it, which manifests itself as a stupid indifference, even hostility, of the thing used. Indeed, if the restrictivist account of everydayness is akin to a Heideggerian idea of dwelling, then the experience of precarity forms an anachronic but stinging example of Theodor W. Adorno's quip about the impossibility of authentic dwelling (*eigentlich Wohnen*) in modern reality.²⁰

Again, there can of course arise moments of conscious aesthetic attention within the existential space of precarity. But they are likely to differ importantly from the kinds described heretofore in expansionist accounts (like appreciating good design or being in awe at something). In my own experience, the effects of precarity on conscious aesthetic experience are two-fold: one, an inclination to escapism and, second, a constitutive negativity of more mindful experiences brought on by an inability to keep one's material-existential situation out of it.

A personal example from years ago might provide something of a dialectical image of both of these. I was watching TV – illustratively, I have no idea what I was watching, as the whole act was an exercise in escaping everything that surrounded me. As I closed it and grudgingly began to face the world again, I suddenly noticed the looming figure of a plant, an emerald palm, that I kept on the windowsill, and how a street light's yellow glow reflected from its smooth, glossy, deep green leaves. The vision attained an elevated allegorical status through a sublimated libidinal rush and a melancholic, existential overdetermination. But there was nothing gracious or uplifting about this experience: it was not even a *schönseelisch* exercise in transcendental longing but a wave of desperation and anxiety. In a way, I just wanted to become the plant; it transubstantiated²¹ into a symbol of a peaceful existence, a life of being instead of doing, thinking and continuous trouble. I would certainly not say that this was not an aesthetic experience, but it wasn't an imaginatively free-floating, open-ended, uncertainty-embracing one. Rather, these are attributing the experience was escaping from, as my mind seemed to be desperately seeking stability and normalcy – something that Heidegger would call fallenness.

So, to recap, whereas a restrictive approach seems to be quite unable to make sense of a precarious everyday, an expansive outlook, focusing on more or less conscious experience, might be a bit better suited for describing and analysing precarity. However, so far (explicitly or implicitly) expansive approaches have been occupied with aesthetic positivity²², and therefore

there is still a fair amount of conceptual work to do if such application is to be systematically realized. Puolakka has recognized the existence of something of a hegemony of pleasantness in everyday aesthetics²³, but this has not yet materialized into a larger shift in research foci in the field. It could be said that this tendency undermines the potential of everyday aesthetics to live up to the promise of its name, especially since precarity, together with other more or less global developments that induce uncertainties and threats in everyday lives, defines the position and experience of a growing number of people.

It should, however, be noted that some excursions into aesthetic negativities of the everyday have been made by e. g. Arnold Berleant, Katya Mandoki and Jane Forsey²⁴, but they have concentrated on negative objects and environments. As I consider precarity to be substantially a relational concept, it does not immediately fit these approaches. That is, precarity, as I see it, is first and foremost a deep-seated mood through which things appear, rather than a matter of what kinds of objects and environments we are surrounded by (although of course these might intertwine in different ways). The distance is highlighted by how Forsey, Berleant and Mandoki all correctly point out that negative aesthetic qualities might urge us to act upon them and change them for the better (cleaning, redesigning, fixing etc.), but the relational quality that precarity contains cannot be “purged” by such activity, but only by more holistic change in one’s material and, thereby, existential position. Again, as hinted at earlier in this chapter, Yuriko Saito’s inclusion in the restrictivist pole of everyday aesthetics by Leddy seems somewhat ungrounded to me since she has paid attention to constant aesthetic negativities in the lives of different demographics and social strata in a way that, even though focusing mainly on objective features, carries with it an existential/relational tone that is somewhat akin to what I claim everyday aesthetics needs more of.²⁵ Especially, her way of suggesting a normative framework of everyday aesthetics by reference to art-centred aesthetics undermines her supposed restrictivism.²⁶ So, when I refer to “the restrictivists” in this article, Saito is not the first philosopher on my mind.

Next, I will consider the relationship of precarity to something that has not yet really been addressed in everyday aesthetics: temporality and, specifically, future time. Analysing precarity from this perspective shows that the subjective positions in everyday aesthetics have been largely about what Heidegger calls fallenness, which I briefly referred to, which precarity and the forced attention it entails shows to be a rather special position instead of something universal; and, at the same time, something that a precarian worker would wish to attain. Heidegger’s conception of attentive temporality does not satisfy the conceptual needs in analysing precarity as temporality, but it provides an illustrative viewpoint.

3. Everydayness and Time: The Wonders of Fallenness

The very concept of precarity logically implies temporality: material and existential uncertainty and distress make sense only as relationships to future time. Overall, the low presence of temporality in everyday aesthetic research is striking considering the huge weight that Heidegger, whom Elisabetta di Stefano positions as the philosopher “with whom daily life officially enters the philosophy of the 20th Century”²⁷ and who has in general had a definitive influence in the field, placed on it. In the same article, di Stefano does write about time in everydayness, but from an angle of cyclicity and rhythm, whereas I am here interested in the existential weight of future time.

The matter of the temporal core of Heidegger’s Dasein has indeed been missing from the domain of everyday aesthetics, even though this motive occupies the whole of Division 2 of *Being and Time*.²⁸ In a way, this omission might be a healthy sign considering the (proto-)fascism baked into the notions of being-towards-death; Dasein’s mortal “fate” being ultimately determined by its relation to “destiny and world history” through localized historical situatedness;²⁹ and the idea of authentic being as “the possibility that Dasein may choose its hero”.³⁰

But if we don’t buy into these specific conclusions about the temporality of our being – I see no logical imperative to do so – we can perhaps simply appreciate how time in an existential sense, more specifically as a horizon of originary anticipation that Heidegger calls “care” (*Sorge*)³¹, is a decisive factor for our experiences of the everyday. The fact that not only restrictivist and expansionist accounts of everydayness but the field in general have neglected this aspect amounts to a situation where the subjective positions present in the research immanently entail a position where time is not present because time does not seem to pose a challenge or put a pressure on the hypothetical subject. What has been done, in other words, is everyday philosophy for a subject that is essentially safe and able to spontaneously and unreflectively dwell in the brackets of the present. Heidegger calls this kind of presentist being “fallenness”, which is not a derogatory or moralist concept, but simply denotes one of our inalienably humane relationships to life and its temporality.

One aspect of fallenness is indeed the disappearance of future time. For Heidegger, this means first and foremost that Dasein’s own mortality retreats from sight in the flux of their everyday life, but this need not categorically be the case when addressing the presence of time in everydayness. It could even be said that thinking about one’s mortality is another kind of privileged position, an emphatically “philosophical” activity of choosing one’s grand cause compared to how a precarian worker is forced to pay attention to their often quite immediate future.

The main point in terms of everyday aesthetics, however, is that especially the restrictivist definition of everydayness is a definition in which time is not, and actually cannot, be present in an existential sense. Smooth habitual action and unnoticed functionality are conditioned by a (more or

less gradual or sudden) dissolving of time into the usefulness of it, into presence pure and simple, a bubble of the now. It is, of course, much rarer and harder to attain such unbothered presence in contexts of distress and worry, when time appears first and foremost as something agonizing, as a pressure. In the case of precarity, this kind of hyper-alert mode is not about an acute possibility of, say, a momentary professional indignity or a distressing social event, but chronically concerns basic material, social and bodily needs and the broader contexts of life. The future is ontologically structured as a foggy, darkly looming or hostile horizon of one's present actions.

However, fallenness is also implied in the pleasurable aesthetic attentiveness and conscious appreciation described in expansionist approaches. They, too, require a certain peace from the future. Applied to the above example of coming home in the previous chapter, consciously enjoying things, even ones in principle endowed with deeply personal meaning and warm memories, or just some kind of aesthetic-functional excellence, might be difficult, forged, half-hearted or impossible due to the menacing uncertainty regarding material and social continuity. Home should be a place where, upon closing the door, one is able to take a deep breath and concentrate on present things that are nice, neat, tasty and so on – to really enjoy fallenness – but in the precarious experience, the future is already there to distract, distress and agonize. The future, in this case, takes the form of conscious experience, but appears to linger somewhere between actual fallenness and philosophical contemplation upon one's temporal limits, forming something of an anxiety-inducing storm cloud that turns *Sorge* rather into a devouring symptom than an underlying existential.

This kind of constant uncertainty and half-knowledge about future continuity are also diagonally opposed to the way Dewey describes them as liberating parts of *an* experience, a model for a lot of everyday aesthetic philosophy. Dewey writes: “Ultimately there are but two philosophies. One of them accepts life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities—to imagination and art.”³² These are indeed valuable experiences, but regarding the position of precarity, Dewey's otherwise very relatable formulation just reveals that we were *je schon* enjoying the luxuriously warm and gentle grip of time, and the unnoticed positivity of it becomes noticed for a while. It is a whole other thing when such half-knowledge and doubt concern things like one's income, housing, sleep schedule, social inclusion, and worth in the eyes of one's relevant society (all of which are obviously amped up if one is, for instance, the parent or legal guardian of a child). Hopelessness is perhaps an extreme point of these worries, upon which Heidegger notes: “Hopelessness ... does not tear *Dasein* away from its possibilities, but is only one of its own modes of being toward these possibilities.”³³ This is precisely what makes hopelessness so excruciating: it is a modulation of care directed at the future, not a lack of it.

The everyday, then, in heretofore restrictivist and expansionist senses is possible for a subject only if the future does not appear to them as uncertain in a precarian sense: chaotic, impenetrable, out of their control, containing specific threats, or containing no prospect for negative things to change. So far, it has been more or less granted that the everyday subject has a relatively safe future, and that time will treat them about as gently as their present life does. If, again, one's life-world is already experienced by a subject through a mode of threatening uncertainty, things are likely to change in terms of aesthetic potential and capability. In precarity, one is much more likely to operate within a sphere of e.g. rigidly mechanic relationships to objects, environments, actions and atmospheres, with diminished means to be unreflectively present, or consciously engage in *aesthesis* in meaningful, imaginative and productive ways. Moreover, as the future in these cases is not harmlessly absent, it also does not invite or allow itself to be experienced as the potential to wonder and awe and say *que sera, sera*.³⁴

One consequence of such estranged and mechanic mode of being and sensing might be that it amplifies and enforces the presence of the infamous "instrumental reason" that has been analysed a lot in the tradition of Critical Theory. In a grounding text of the tradition, Max Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, instrumental reason is described specifically as an unhealthy, life-quenching relationship to time. In their analysis of the glorified abilities of Homer's character of Odysseus – cunning, deceit, self-preservation above everything – they describe how this literary figure's position is not that of a subject, but of a pure ego, "which owes its existence to the sacrifice of the present moment to the future."³⁵ This, I claim, is familiar to many a precarian worker. At worst, I have personally noticed to be instrumentalising things I read or watch, people, as well as social events and my very own thoughts. Everything is filtered through spontaneous, implicit questions like "is there money in this", "can I use this in my work", "could I enhance my situation by talking to these and those people in such and such a way". In addition to being ethically horrendous and psychologically destructive, this is a prime example of not being present but constantly living in hypothetical futures. The aesthetic consequences of this position are perhaps quite unsurprising: calculated and manipulative gestures and words, hyper-alertly noticing those of others, and, especially regarding art, a kind of impatience and an inability to be open to multiplicities or uncertainties of meanings and interpretations. The body, the senses, even one's thoughts and emotions become controlled instruments of self-preservation and assurance rather than the delicate texture and matrix of life's tastes.

Instead of putting forth still new examples of the aesthetic effects of forced attention to future time, it is perhaps useful to simply consider the examples above from this perspective. I have already noted on the presence of a negative future upon entering one's habitat, but also the scene of me watching TV and then encountering the emerald palm are ultimately only comprehensible if

considered as relationships to, among other things, future time: they are attempts to escape it and, as it were, manufacture fallenness. Both the desperate escape into the weakly immersive glow of the TV and the strong impulse to turn into the plant were essentially desires to lose sense of subjective time because of the menacing material and existential attributes it had acquired. This is one more illustration of how the precarian worker might lose their ability to live their everyday in terms of an unnoticed, comfortable support structure, but would very much like to do so and, for lack of such possibility, tries to spontaneously come up with temporary surrogates.

4. Conclusions and Further Considerations

Above, I have described the condition of precarity in its effects for the experience of everydayness. It appears that it poses somewhat similar but genetically non-equal challenges to the restrictive definition of everydayness as non-repetitive or eclectic lifestyles, like that of Puolakka's Gergiev, do. Expansive approaches to everydayness could probably be better suited for analysing the experiential landscape of precarity, but not without considerable conceptual efforts. So far there has been no such effort because the focus regarding day-to-day life has been on aesthetic positivity. On the other hand, both the restrictivist and expansionist takes on everydayness often superbly describe things that every subject in one way or another, and to some extent or another, wishes for themselves, takes care of and aims for. Further, regarding research on negative aesthetic features of the everyday, heretofore texts are not adequate to deal with precarity due to the latter's relational rather than object-generated quality.

As to the needed conceptual efforts mentioned, some further notes are in place. For example, just as precarity seems to pose a challenge to the definition of the "everyday", it poses one regarding the concept of "aesthetics" in the field. The condition of precarity seems to be a reminder of the need to keep an open mind here. An honorary use of "aesthetics" will obviously not do, so I am inclined to emphasize more classificatory definitions such as Katya Mandoki's value-free one: "Aesthesis is a condition of live beings. Moreover, it is not 'a condition' but 'the condition' of life. To live implies aesthesis (which does not mean that everything in life is aesthesis)."³⁶ Her view counters the mainstream of everyday aesthetics in that, for her, aesthesis is nothing positive or even reflective to begin with, but entails all the best and worst possibilities of our lives as embodied, sensory, affective, meaning-making, desiring beings. Perhaps it would not even be too dramatic to modulate Merleau-Ponty's famous statement and claim that 'We are condemned to aesthesis.'³⁷ Such a view is of course subject to the critique, posed by e.g. Giovanni Matteucci,³⁸ that it includes mere sensations as aesthesis, but this not need categorically be the case. Indeed, it could hardly be claimed that my examples and descriptions in this article have been about "mere" sensations – insofar as such a sensation is even conceivable. On the contrary,

I have dealt with both the flow of daily life and time and exceptional experiences as highly charged with moods, impressions, affects and intentionalities.

The fact that these contents are not aesthetic in any honorary sense while still constituting, as I have claimed, something of a texture and *Stimmung* of daily life for a social group is a conceptual challenge that everyday aesthetics should face. Could this, perhaps, be done through the recently intensified philosophical work on atmospheres by e.g. Elisabetta di Stefano, Gernot Böhme, Jean-Paul Thibaud and others³⁹? Could precarity be considered as some kind of omnipresently infectious, largely anaesthetic (in the honorific sense) atmosphere – or a unique combination of different atmospheres, like unrelaxed and distracted or, on the other hand, weary and comfort-seeking ones? The main issue with this approach could be that, on the face of it, such an atmosphere one carries around is bound to be private and subjective, unless part of a project or gig-like work effort by a group, or a heartfelt rant about one's pressing situation in a social setting. However, atmospheres tend to be noticed and spread, often indeed against one's will, and even though an atmosphere caused by a precarian life-situation might be initially private, it quite likely radiates through, affecting situations and social settings. That is, one might not so much *share* the atmosphere of precarity as *communicate* parts of it – either verbally, or with more or less inadvertent gestures, and others might even pick up more of it than one realizes.

I wish to emphasize that, regarding the broader reasons for including precarity in the discourse of everyday aesthetics, dealing with its dissonances and negativities might prepare everyday aesthetics to deal with other sources of similar existential positions. Considering increasing socio-economic precarity together with, for instance, current ecological, (geo)political and cultural developments, it is not at all clear that safety, cosiness, normalcy and purely aesthetic appreciation will be credible ways to capture the aesthetic registers of daily life in the foreseeable future, as has been pointed by Andrew Light and Ariane Nomikos, among others.⁴⁰ Everyday aesthetics should, therefore, prepare for conceptual shifts in order to hold on to its social relevance and applicability. This way, the field might be part of a larger whole of research that could even cause societal change regarding the effects of different destabilising and threatening developments (instead of e.g. becoming a philosophical toolbox for quelling strategies like mindfulness and self-development). From the precarian point of view, I am thinking about, for example, what everyday aesthetics could give to the discussion on basic income.

In short, I hope my text encourages scholars to further approach the growing class of precarian workers, but also more broadly to consider the field of everyday aesthetics more from societally and materially informed perspectives in order to address the aesthetic registers of a rapidly changing world.

- ¹ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany* (London: Verso 1998), p. 62 (translation modified).
- ² David Neilson, "Class, Precarity, and Anxiety under Neoliberal Global Capitalism: From Denial to Resistance", *Theory & Psychology* Vol. 25, No. 2 (2015), pp. 184–201; cit. on p. 184–5.
- ³ E.g. Ramsay Liem, "The Psychological Costs of Unemployment: A Comparison of Findings and Definitions", *Social Research*, 54, 2, Unemployment (Summer 1987), pp. 319–353; Scott Weich and Glyn Lewis, "Poverty, unemployment, and common mental disorders: population based cohort study", *BMJ* Vol 317, 7175 (July 1998), pp. 115–119; Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir, *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much* (New York: Times Books 2013); Carl Van Horn, Cliff Zukin and Allison Kopicki, *Left Behind: The Long-term Unemployed Struggle in an Improving Economy* (New Brunswick: State University of New Jersey 2014); Asfiya Kidwai and Zain Sarwar, "Psychological Impacts of Unemployment – Evidence from the Literature", *Review of Integrative Business & Economics Research*, 4, 3 (March 2015), pp. 141–152; Kevin Doogan, "Precarity – Minority Condition or Majority Experience?" in Donatella della Porta, Sakari Hänninen, Martti Siisiäinen, Tiina Silvasti (eds.), *The New Social Division: Making and Unmaking Precariousness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2015), pp. 43–62; Joonas Martikainen, *Political Poverty as the Loss of Experiential Freedom* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki 2021).
- ⁴ "Experience of Awe: An Expansive Approach to Everyday Aesthetics," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 13 (2015).
- ⁵ Frederick Johannes Potgieter, "An Educational Perspective and a Poststructural Position on Everyday Aesthetics and the Creation of Meaning", *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Volume 51, Number 3, Fall (2017), pp. 72–90.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, Sec. 1.
- ⁷ Francisca Pérez-Carreño, "The Aesthetic Value of the Unnoticed", in Oiva Kuisma, Sanna Lehtinen and Harri Mäcklin (eds.), in *Paths from the Philosophy of Art to Everyday Aesthetics* (Helsinki: Finnish Society for Aesthetics 2019), p. 148–166.
- ⁸ Arto Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place," in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds. Andrew Light & Jonathan M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press 2005), pp. 39–55.
- ⁹ Arto Haapala, "The Everyday, Building, and Architecture: Reflections on the Ethos and Beauty of our Built Surroundings," *Cloud-Cuckoo-Land*, 22, 36 (2017), 171–182.
- ¹⁰ Ossi Naukkarinen, "What is 'Everyday' in Everyday Aesthetics?," Sec. 6.
- ¹¹ Ossi Naukkarinen, "Everyday Aesthetics and Everyday Behavior", *Contemporary Aesthetics* 15 (2017), cit. on Sec. 3.
- ¹² *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Canada: Broadview Press 2012).
- ¹³ Leddy, "Experience of Awe", Sec. 1.
- ¹⁴ E. g. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Worlds: Reclaiming an Unredeemed Utopian Motif", *New Literary History* Vol. 37, No. 2, Critical Inquiries (Spring, 2006), pp. 299–318; Salem Al Qudwa, "Aesthetic Value of Minimalist Architecture in Gaza", *Contemporary Aesthetics* Vol. 15 (2017); Bence Nanay, "The Aesthetic Experience of Artworks and Everyday Scenes", *The Monist* Vol. 101, No. 1 (2018), pp. 71–82.
- ¹⁵ Kalle Puolakka, "On Habits and Functions in Everyday Aesthetics", *Contemporary Aesthetics* 16 (2018), cit. in Sec. 2.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*; the last cit. in Sec. 3.
- ¹⁷ Kalle Puolakka, "Does Valery Gergyev Have an Everyday?" in Oiva Kuisma, Sanna Lehtinen and Harri Mäcklin (eds.), *Paths from the Philosophy of Art to Everyday Aesthetics* (Helsinki: Finnish Society for Aesthetics 2019), p. 132–147.
- ¹⁸ Ossi Naukkarinen, "What is 'Everyday' in Everyday Aesthetics?," Sec. 2.
- ¹⁹ Arto Haapala, "Strangeness and Familiarity in the Urban Environment." In A. Haapala (ed.), *City as a Cultural Metaphor: Studies in Urban Aesthetics* (Lahti: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics 1998), pp. 108–125.
- ²⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso 2005), p. 38.
- ²¹ Lars-Olof Åhlberg recently aimed deserved critique to the incorrect way in which Arthur Danto applies the theological term of transfiguration (entailing *perceptual* change), whereas the whole point of the "problem of indiscernible counterparts" that grounds Danto's philosophy of art is transubstantiation (consisting of change only in transcendental *substance*). "Everyday and Otherworldly Objects: Dantesque Transfiguration" in *Paths from the Philosophy of Art to Everyday Aesthetics* (Helsinki: Finnish Society for Aesthetics 2019), p. 41–62.
- ²² *Contemporary Aesthetics* Special Volume 7: Aesthetics and Terrorism (2019).
- ²³ Puolakka, "On Habits and Functions in Everyday Aesthetics", Sec. 1.
- ²⁴ Katya Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the play of culture and social identities* (Burlington: Ashgate 2007); Arnold Berleant, "Negative Aesthetics in Everyday Life", *Aesthetic Pathways* Vol. 1, No. 2 (2011), pp. 75–91; Jane Forsey, "The Aesthetic Force of the Unpleasant", *Evental Aesthetics* Vol. 5, No. 1 (2016), pp. 15–24.
- ²⁵ E. g. Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press 2008), Ch. V "Moral-Aesthetic Judgements of Artefacts"; "Consumer Aesthetics and Environmental Ethics: Problems and Possibilities", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 76 No. 4 (2018), pp. 429–439.
- ²⁶ Yuriko Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics and World-Making", *Contrastes Revista Internacional de Filosofía* Vol. 25 No. 3 (2012), pp. 255–274.
- ²⁷ Elisabetta di Stefano, "The Rhythm of Time in Everyday Aesthetics", in Zoltán Somegyi and Max Rynnänen (eds.), *Aesthetics in Dialogue: Applying Philosophy of Art in a Global World* (Berlin: Peter Lang 2020), pp. 29–38; cit. on p. 30. Let it be added that Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer had their own post-Marxist critical phenomenology of the everyday at the same time, and even before, Heidegger, but di Stefano is certainly right about Heidegger making things "official" in the sphere of philosophy.
- ²⁸ Division 2 (Dasein and Temporality) in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, transl. Jean Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press 2010), p. 221–437.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 357.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 367.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 227.

³² Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 35.

³³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 227.

³⁴ Threats can, of course, emanate from the past, too, of which trauma, PTSD and moral hangover are obvious examples.

³⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2002), p. 40. It could be argued that Adorno and Horkheimer are, in general, talking about a societal system rather than “psychological” dimensions. However, at the book’s very heart are the ways in which this system “infects” individuals through its structures, which is exactly what I am talking about here.

³⁶ Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*, p. 73.

³⁷ “Because we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning, and we cannot do or say anything without its acquiring a name in history.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge), p. xxii.

³⁸ Giovanni Matteucci, “Everyday Aesthetics and aestheticization: reflectivity in perception”, *Studi di estetica*, anno XLV, IV serie, 1 (2017), pp. 207–227.

³⁹ Elisabetta de Stefano, “Designing Atmospheres. The Role of Aesthetics in the Requalification of Space”, *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Environmental Design* (Milan: De Lettera Publishers 2017), pp. 15–21; Gernot Böhme & Jean-Paul Thibaud, *Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (New York: Routledge 2017); Tonino Griffero & Marco Tedeschini (eds.), *Atmosphere and Aesthetics: A Plural Perspective* (New York: Palgrave 2019).

⁴⁰ Andrew Light, “Aesthetic Integrity, Climate Loss, and Damage”, keynote presentation at the Interim Conference of the International Association of Aesthetics at Aalto University, Espoo, Finland (5.7.2018); Ariane Nomikos, “Place Matters”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 76, No. 4, Special Issue: The Good, the Beautiful, the Green: Environmentalism and Aesthetics (Fall 2018), pp. 453–46.

DRUGSWORLD: ALTERED PERCEPTION OF AESTHETICS DIMENSION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Dana Svorova

Abstract

The consumption of illegal drugs is steadily increasing. As it is connected to eliciting the feeling of pleasure, whose rationale is found in phylogenetic evolution and its key contribution to the survival of human beings, this worrying phenomenon can be assessed as an important, although neglected, part of the field of study labeled as negative aesthetics of everyday life. In the name of pleasure, drugs introduce a dangerous as much as misleading misperception of the aesthetic dimension, mistaking alteration for reality. In this respect, several common aspects pertaining to Everyday Aesthetics can be identified, namely, the awe, the extraordinary, the aura, and more. This essay points to the complex issue of the false values defining contemporary societies and to the lack of internal subjective balance. An attempt is therefore made to suggest a pathway for the restoration of true ethical and aesthetic values understood as the key to living a meaningful life.

Keywords

Drugs, everyday life, pleasure, altered perception, negative aesthetics.

Buying drugs is like buying a ticket to a fantastic world, but the price of this ticket is life.

Jim Morrison

1. Introduction

The consumption of recreational drugs is a global issue of the utmost seriousness. Statistical data confirm each year a continuous increase in this disquieting phenomenon.¹ In addition, the current distress—especially on the psyche—caused by the COVID-19 pandemic could not but emphasize said state of affairs.² One might well wonder what drives each year millions of people around the world to consume psychoactive drugs despite being well aware of their destructive power. Is social and psychological discomfort enough to justify the proportions of this phenomenon? What exactly makes drugs so attractive that they become in many cases a loyal companion of everyday life?

Drug addiction has been investigated within the framework of several fields of study. In psychology, for instance, important contributions have been offered by Freud, Stanton, Todd, and Bergeret³, which emphasized the conflict-ridden internal background of subjects suffering from addiction; in the field of sociology, interesting aspects have been pointed out by Bourdieu, Bourgois, Duprez, and Kokoreff⁴ in relation to urban subcultures, and the alteration of

consciousness and perception resulting from drug consumption has been investigated from the viewpoint of philosophy by Benjamin, Derrida, and Foucault⁵. In this essay, I will focus on a closely connected, yet somehow neglected, aspect of drug consumption, namely pleasure. This allows an aesthetic investigation which takes into account the social and psychological backdrop favoring the fast spreading of the phenomenon of drug addiction.

Drugs appear in fact to be a fast, easy, and effective dispenser of immediate happiness. Their rock-solid success is based upon their ability to generate feelings of pleasure and gratification, which are identical to those phylogenetically functional to the evolution of human beings on the planet. Is it therefore legit, in this respect, to account for the drug experience in terms of everyday aesthetics?

In the wake of the Everyday Aesthetics line of inquiry, the realm of aesthetics has significantly expanded to include topics which, just a few years earlier, used to be taken as not relevant within the philosophical range of interest. The scrutiny of everyday life and its countless situations has shown that not only the elitist art sphere is pervaded by an aesthetic dimension, but also, notably, aspects of our daily life often seen as trivial and routinary. According to the theorists of Everyday Aesthetics, the aesthetic dimension has a key role in each individual life and covers most of our existence. A shift in interest from the object to the experience—here understood as a dynamic process performed by the subject in relation to the surrounding world—has paved the way to a reassessment of what pertains to everyday life from a philosophical point of view. Everyday Aesthetics extends its roots, in fact, in the theory of experience developed by John Dewey in order to outline anew the realm of aesthetics.

While aesthetics of everyday life used to sound like an oxymoron, inasmuch as it seemed to evade the canonical topics of aesthetics, an even greater challenge is to talk about a negative aesthetics of everyday life, inasmuch as aesthetics is traditionally understood—exception made for few rare instances—as having to do not only with art but also with beauty, pleasure, harmony, that is to say, prevalingly positive values. However, whenever a sense-based experience, although pleasurable at the beginning, later turns out to be stressful, harmful or even detrimental for the individual, there is no doubt that the context can be qualified as negative. As Arnold Berleant puts it, “we can speak of negative aesthetic values, of negative aesthetics when, in the primacy of perceptual experience, the experience as a whole is in some sense unsatisfying, distressing, or harmful. Aesthetic experience is not always benign. [...] The very complexity of the aesthetics contributes to obscuring the negative, but once we recognize its presence in aesthetic experience, we can begin to explore the often-unacknowledged value.”⁶ These experiences might not be easy to identify inasmuch as “Aesthetic negativity is widespread in daily life but its presence is often obscure and hidden, in part because it is commonplace and unremarked. Negative

aesthetic experience occurs in many guises, from the offensive environmental conditions that shadow daily life to the drama of terrorist attacks, but perhaps the most egregious instances of negative experience are those that inflict physical or emotional pain.”⁷

Nevertheless, only a marginal attention is often given to the realm of negative aesthetics. This is mainly due to its implicit negative essence, which somehow defies research, or, to say it better, establishes a refusal, which “amounts to negating, in the most varied and deceiving ways, the existence of what exists and we even have knowledge of.”⁸ Clearly, this does not refute the existence of several aspects connected to the negative aesthetics of everyday life within our contemporary societies, as affected by globalization, alienation, anonymization, individualism, and precariousness. These features of our world provide an undoubtedly fertile ground for an increasingly faster spreading of negative aesthetic experiences.

Some scholars—among others, Joseph H. Kupfer,⁹ Arnold Berleant,¹⁰ Katya Mandoki¹¹—can be mentioned here, who have pointed out some inconvenient truths in relation to uneasy topics, such as deliberate violence, perversion, the manipulation of emotions by politics, the visual overstimulation of urban areas, and so on. These aspects of society, on which the negative aesthetics of everyday life insists, expose our contemporary world to an open criticism, reinforced by the disquieting continuous increase in numbers [of certain phenomena]. The negative aesthetics of everyday life raises a red flag while connecting aesthetic and moral values to social and cultural aspects.¹²

To the areas explored by the authors mentioned above, one can add a silent but extremely widespread phenomenon, namely that of the consumption of psychoactive drugs. The very topic of drug consumption inevitably entails a certain reluctance or refusal to include it as an aspect of everyday life. This is so because it is commonly seen not only as something illegal and forbidden but also as deplorable, degrading, dirty, and therefore as very far from the well-reputed aesthetic dimension of beauty and its countless declinations. This approach disregards, however, the fact that drug consumption is based upon the experience of pleasure and gratification. It is in fact nothing but a perceptual and emotional overstimulation connected to an insatiable quest for pleasure. In the name of pleasure a progressive and deliberate destruction of one’s body and personality can be observed, which Kupfer and Berleant have detected in other contexts as the defining trait of the negative aesthetics of everyday life.

According to both scholars in fact a deliberate and harmful act does not need to be aimed externally in order to generate in the transgressing individual a feeling of satisfaction, but it can be aimed also toward oneself. It is furthermore worth remarking that in relation to this complex issue a significant shift in aesthetic and moral values at individual, cultural, and social level can be observed as pointing in the direction of the distorted and altered. In this respect, granted that

“all perception and every condition can have an aesthetic dimension, at times invisible or unnoticed, at other times minor, but sometimes dominant,”¹³ as pointed out by Arnold Berleant in one of his contributions, then also the experience of taking drugs belongs to the aesthetic dimension in its dominant, although altered, dimension.

2. The dangerous power of pleasure

The consumption of psychoactive substances is not a prerogative of modernity. Early drugs did not necessarily have a negative connotation. Some of them had a sacred or healing function, while others would be used to enhance the flavor of food in culinary recipes. The adverse effects on health have been detected relatively recently thanks to the advances of scientific research proving that regular consumption of some drugs provokes irreversible damages on the central nervous system and the rest of the body.

In the first half of the 20th century many drugs could be purchased in pharmacies as remedies against several ailments caused by stress, fatigue, nervousness, or even as pain killers, tranquilizers, invigorating and energizing supplements. Based on advertisements from the '30s, '40s and '50s it can be inferred that many already known and new drugs, such as methadone, amphetamines, methamphetamines, barbiturates and LSD would be prescribed by doctors to cope with daily fatigue, to enhance students' and soldiers' performances, to ease pregnancy-related discomfort, and to alleviate the frustration of housewives.¹⁴ In the '60s and '70s drugs experienced great popularity and were employed in psychotherapeutic settings. Some psychologists, such as Timothy Leary, Ralf Metzner, and Richard Alpert, spoke in favor of employing psychoactive substances in order to better explore human minds and expand them toward the Universal Mind.¹⁵ At about the same time, the first studies on the damages to the central nervous system, other damages to the organism, and malformations in newborns progressively started to emerge.¹⁶ With the widespread use of heroin, cocaine, hashish, marijuana, LSD, and crack, the number of deaths for overdose stalked. In the '80s HIV infection spread rapidly among drug addicted subjects. Since then, a clear fight against drug addiction was conducted through innovative therapeutic programs. The black market has nevertheless always been able to satisfy the demand. At present, although the therapeutic value of some drugs is recognized, most of them are known for their devastating effects on human organisms.

Nowadays, drugs are categorized based on their level of danger in legal (e.g., tea, coffee, alcohol, nicotine, light cannabis) and illegal drugs; within the latter group one distinguishes between natural drugs, (e.g. In Italy cannabis with a higher than 0.6% THC content, opium, cocaine, and psilocybin mushrooms) and synthetic drugs (e.g. amphetamines, heroin, LSD, etc.) as well as between soft drugs and heavy drugs.

Legal drugs are not seen as hazardous and are commonly accepted. As they belong to cultural traditions, they are not even seen as drugs in the negative sense of the word, but rather as exciting and energizing substances or as euphorizing and relaxing. They are widely in use and belong to everyday life in most cultures around the world. Some theorists of Everyday Aesthetics, among whom Yuriko Saito and Sherry Irvin, have even identified the consumption of tea and coffee as one distinctive aspect of the aesthetics of everyday life. With reference to Japanese culture, Yuriko Saito sees in the time devoted to tea drinking an experience filled with spirituality. The ceremony of tea is a true collective rite made of meditative moments and moments of sharing. One can therefore claim that it indeed makes display of the features of a ceremony in its own right¹⁷ devoted to tea, inasmuch as aesthetic and moral values interpenetrate. As remarked by Elisabetta Di Stefano, “the tea ceremony is both a moment of meditation and a form of art, inasmuch as every small action is full of meaning.”¹⁸ Sherry Irvin also presents the consumption of coffee as a “quietly exquisite and even strangely foreign (experience), when done with full attention.”¹⁹ In this regard, Di Stefano writes that “nowadays making a cup of coffee, when foam decorated, has reached the fame of art, “Latte Art.” [...] Latte Art requires creativity and, like Fine Arts, causes emotion and gives pleasure. In our daily routine, foam drawings always make us smile and start us off on a good day.”²⁰ These two typical routines of everyday life perfectly exemplify everyday aesthetics if performed “in full awareness of the moment we experience.”²¹

In this essay, a shift is performed in the direction of the negative aesthetics of everyday life, and the experience of illegal drugs is scrutinized. Although this kind of experience has been overlooked by the inquiries on everyday life, several aspects can be elucidated that are common to the paradigms of Everyday Aesthetics. Furthermore, the hazardousness of this phenomenon as based upon the experience of pleasure can be suitably pinpointed within this framework. The consumption of illegal drugs—henceforth only drugs—in today’s consumerist societies is no longer an isolated and sporadic event. On the contrary, it is widely common, transversal, and encompassing all social groups and almost all ages, starting in some cases already in the pre-adolescence. Progressively spreading from the high society to the poorest suburbs, drug consumption has become part of a full-fledged lifestyle. Far from its early connections with initiations and sacred rituals, on the back of curiosity and of the insatiable desire for aprioristic happiness, drugs replicate “on the level of emotions the same values defining contemporary societies as developed around forms of illusion, artifice, and consumption. As philosopher Umberto Galimberti remarks, within consumerist societies, consumption comprehends not only objects—already obsolete from the beginning—but also, thanks to the contribution of drugs, life itself.”²² Authentic emotions are simply replaced by the more intense ones artificially produced by drugs.²³

Featuring crumbling apart families, leveled down school systems, subverted symbolic values, solitude, existential precariousness, and on the opposite corner, vast wealth, fame, and the star system, contemporary societies, as Galimberti puts it, push many to alleviate their feelings of boredom and emptiness typical of everyday life with the spellbinding pleasure of drugs. The consumption of vivid and strong emotions has one precise goal: to feel alive. Di Stefano aptly captures the fact that we have been long living in a potentiated reality, where increasingly more sophisticated technologies and an unstoppable flow of information provide “more intense and captivating experiences compared to the dullness of ordinary life”, which lead to an “ecstasy of hyperreality”.²⁴ The side effect of all this is that it also “reduces the emotional impact and ends up producing indifference,”²⁵ in other words, a collective dulling swamping our daily lives.

Already Susanne K. Langer deals with the topic of the social distress caused by the stressful proliferation of symbols, and emphasizes that human beings inevitably feel the need to flee toward more reassuring and stable worlds, away from daily reality. On the one hand, people try then to restore their psycho-physical balance through highly introspective practices such as yoga, meditation, spiritual retreats, as pointed out by Richard Shusterman in his *Somaesthetics*; on the other hand, people try to reach illusory and fake worlds through the consumption of drugs. With regard to these latter, an implicit, as much as inevitable, shift is recorded from constructive values to destructive ones. Langer insists that every culture in history brings about a change in style and values due to changes in the *Weltanschauung* of that given society.²⁶ The data about drug consumption nevertheless show the true colors of our society of nothingness.²⁷ People take drugs because they like it, because they can momentarily fill in the void left by boredom and emotional dullness, or even just for fun, for the sake of a strong emotion, for the high. In the jargon of drug consumers, the high stands for “the particular, temporary effect of excitement and psychological and physical wellbeing following the consumption of drugs as well as the period of time during which someone is under the influence of drugs.”²⁸ In the so-called drug culture,²⁹ the consumption of drugs is seen as an *extraordinary* event, a special moment, almost a party in the party, which can be repeated cyclically in those places of weekly socialization to evade everyday dullness. A black market with affordable prices offers every kind of out of the ordinary experience to be shared with friends for relatively little money. Soon one is floating on air without a care in the world, wrapped in loud euphoria, sinking in fascinating relaxation, experiencing vivid and strong emotions, seeing colorful hallucinations, or reaching an artificial orgasm. The collective co-participation intensifies even more this kind of over-the-top experience.

The pleasantness of the effects of drugs is confirmed also by the eloquent testimony of Walter Benjamin, who, within the framework of his studies on the perception of the world with wide-open senses, tested the effects of hashish on himself, and wrote: “I experience this as poetic

evidence. [...] I would draw a connection between the laughter and the extraordinary mental vacillation. [...] Admit positively splendid.”³⁰ Drugs are therefore, in some respects, not only a synonym of pastime or of pleasure pervading the whole body, but they also imply an extraordinary moment experienced in the present, that is to say, in the widely acclaimed *hic et nunc*. Clearly, what is at stake is a moment as extraordinary as it is misleading and deeply connected with an objectively pathological component.

Although very different from taking drugs, also the mindfulness method allows us to experience the present moment and savor the tiniest feeling connected to the mind and the body. A state of bliss can even be reached once said technique is mastered. Psychoactive drugs make it easier to get to that greatly coveted happiness. The mental state obtained by meditation can indeed be compared to what is produced by some drugs.³¹ These can in fact increase the activity of some neurotransmitters naturally present in the organism, such as serotonin, also known as the mood regulating hormone, dopamine, the feel-good hormone, oxytocin, the love hormone, and endorphins, the hormone of satisfaction. The production of these neurotransmitters forced by drugs is certainly effective in noticeably increasing their levels. Ecstasy for instance is proven to be able to increase serotonin by 900%.³² However, it also inhibits the natural ability of the body to produce the same hormone.³³ Numerous scientific studies show that also meditation is able to increase levels of serotonin, melatonin,³⁴ endorphins, dopamine,³⁵ and noticeably lower the levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. The organism is in fact able to naturally produce the well-being substances it requires or can be helped by physiological stimulus through several bodily or meditative techniques. However, physical activity and meditation require effort, dedication, discipline, self-control, whereas dropping a pill produces, effortlessly, an extremely pleasurable alteration of one’s consciousness. This mirrors the paradigmatic must of contemporary societies: everything right now with the smallest possible effort.

An authentic report on the ambiguity of the world of drugs is available in the book *Zoo Station: The Story of Christiane F.*. Published in 1978 and based on the true story of a teenager from Berlin, this book offers a crude testimony on the relationship young people entertain with drugs. Nested within a daily life made of family conflicts, skipped classes, the environmental degradation of the suburbs, and broken hearts, drugs are seen as a coveted object of desire. They are put on a pedestal, from which they irradiate some sort of aura, what the ancient Greeks called “breath” or “glow,” and “which can be extended figuratively to the atmosphere around a person, thing or place.”³⁶ This pseudo *aura* is justified by the implicit promise of pleasure, happiness, and fulfilment of desired emotions on the backdrop of something prohibited. In other words, drugs are simultaneously an object of veneration and something to be rejected in reaction to a certain unspoken fear. These features equally pertain to the concept of awe, as accounted for by Thomas

Leddy concerning everyday life. In just three letters, awe describes a complex condition, implying admiration, astonishment, and overwhelming fear when facing someone or something. In this regard, the aura is, in Monroe Beardsley's words, an "idea of intensity" and a "concentration of experience."³⁷ As matter of fact, the experience of drugs is often described by the insiders with the adjectives fun, amazing, extraordinary, awe-inspiring, marvellous; all these terms are also included in the "bestiary of aesthetics terms for everyday contexts"³⁸ put together by Thomas Leddy under the category "terms of very high valuation."³⁹ Drugs therefore distinguish themselves for their ability to increase and intensify the ordinary experience of everyday life.

On the backdrop of a pseudo-sacrality, the consumption of drugs is a true collective rite⁴⁰ performed within a community. People gather in a secluded place in anxious expectation for the moment leading to ecstasy. The object of desire is amiably shared among all members of the community who are invited to partake in peaceful conviviality. This kind of gathering usually features a relaxed atmosphere and lively conversations on shared topics, accompanied by a general drug-induced amiability. Among members a strong sense of belonging is felt, which is emphasized also by a peculiar style in their clothes and accessories. Membership to such a community is perceived as a true privilege.

As reported by Christiane F. concerning the group who facilitated her first encounters with drugs: "The whole group was super cool. They gave the impression that they were different from the other teenagers who hung out at the club. They wore skin-tight jeans, big, crazy boots, and their jackets were all either denim or else these crazy things [...] but they looked amazing."⁴¹ Entry to such a group is reserved to few chosen ones upon direct invitation from established members of the group. Their bond is formed, namely, by drugs, the sharing of moments of artificially produced sensorial experiences, and mutual respect. Christiane F. does not hide her disbelief in being accepted into the group, which seen from the outside appears worthy of great respect: "The people in this clique were cool in a way that was completely new to me. They weren't loud, they didn't get into fights, and they didn't show off. They were pretty quiet. They just kind of exuded superiority."⁴² Contacts become increasingly more frequent; doses gradually increase. This state of things, if not timely blocked, foreshadows a one-way journey toward drug addiction, with all its negative consequences on the general decay of the individual.

Christiane Vera Felscherinow's story was documented by two journalists, Kai Hermann and Horst Rieck. They relied on recordings of Christiane's autobiographical narration, and the use of real names and photos was authorized also by the other members of Christiane's groups of drug users. Prosecutor documents presented to court, the final sentence of the court in Neumünster, the statements of consulted psychologists and rehab supervisors, and the painful testimony of her mother, in short, every deposition offered during trial was also included in the

documentary report. In 1981 a movie was shot by director Uli Edel under the title *Christiane F. – We Children from Zoo Station*. Both the book and the movie have been contributing to the fight against youth drug addiction.

As a matter of fact, under the false pretense of pleasure, drugs make thousands of young people each year sink into an abyss. The source for this behavior can be found namely in the altered perception of reality and of the values connected to it. As remarked by Amber Sanders, John M. Stogner and Bryan Lee Miller, mostly teenagers get more easily duped, as “they are potentially influenced more by what they think their friends do [...] This relationship may arise from a youth’s desire to avoid standing out, to be a more attractive peer to their friends, to gain acceptance.”⁴³ This is where the firm belief is formed that a behaviour, although wrong, might be normal. As a result, a shift can be registered in the symbolic values allowing people to identify with a group. In the era of the global village, as emphasized by Langer, people escape into exotic cults prospecting a new world of salvation.⁴⁴ In the worst case scenario, based on widespread false values, young people “go down that one-way road, which is supposed to make up for a lack of identity through the security of belonging to a tribe, outside of which there is only the solitude of social anonymity.”⁴⁵ Another disquieting element emerges here: solitude is experienced even amidst a crowd. And this is what leads to looking for a friend in drugs. These latter are able to fill in the void caused by lack of real and long-term interpersonal relations, and suddenly lead to a better, more welcoming, less hostile, more friendly world. Drugs develop into some sort of alter ego, namely, an inseparable companion of everyday life.

3. Altered perception of reality

Concerning drugs and the field of aesthetics, important contributions have been made also by Monroe Beardsley. He points for instance to “the LSD problem”⁴⁶ in reference to the experience generated by that hallucinatory drug. Under LSD people report feeling “exquisite aesthetic gratification.”⁴⁷ According to Beardsley, however, said experience is only illusory. He quotes for instance the experience of Dr. Lloyd A. Brumbles, a Philadelphia psychiatrist, who “said that while listening to Beethoven’s *Eroica*, particularly the third movement, he felt simultaneously insatiable longing and total gratification.”⁴⁸ As this is exactly what happens also when he sees a painting by Picasso and one by Renoir, it is clear, Beardsley concludes, that “he was under the influence of something.”⁴⁹ It should be noted that Beardsley’s institutional field of research does not include everyday experience and relies only on the canonical notions of the discipline. As he emphasizes, aesthetic gratification is closely linked to the concept of aesthetic value. And this latter can be, in his view, appropriately condensed in the formula:

The aesthetic value of X is the value that X possesses in virtue of its capacity to provide aesthetic gratification *when correctly and completely experienced*.⁵⁰

However, in a false society, ruled by excesses out-of-proportion in each realm of life, to the detriment of primary needs phylogenetically codified to allow people to “[mature] into balanced, even happy people”⁵¹ authentic feelings are slyly silenced. Deprived of references well rooted in culture,⁵² reality tends in fact to generate in people what Konrad Lorenz defines as “illness of the spirit.”⁵³ Human beings are forced to come to terms, in the words of Jean Baudrillard, with pseudo-realities, where truth is hidden, not behind consumerist alluring slogans and images reproduced in series, deified “simulacra”⁵⁴ and n-dimensional virtual realities, but rather behind the “unhappy non-distinction between true and false, between the real and its signs.”⁵⁵ Within this fleeting and unstable context, Beardsley’s formula is then replaced by the following one:

The aesthetic value of X is the value that X possesses in virtue of its capacity to provide aesthetic gratification *when highly and extremely experienced*.

Based on this notion one can also understand the popularity of so-called chemsex, new psychoactive substances such as *salvia divinorum*, bath salts, etc. No taboo is left standing; all kinds of experiences have become common, with a resulting lowering in the threshold of perceptual sensitivity and a striving for extreme experiences. A shake or intense shiver of pleasure needs to be felt in order to have fun. Otherwise, one struggles to feel alive. This is how romantic intimacy between lovers becomes a chemsex party, where to make display of highly performant and long-lasting sexual virtuosity; the primordial desires for flesh and cannibalism are awakened by bath salts; and a total rapture is experienced with *salvia divinorum*⁵⁶.

Besides the above-mentioned extreme experiences and the distortion of reality triggered by hallucinatory substances and mentioned by Beardsley, there is no doubt that drugs in general can produce an intense pleasure. The drug-induced experience is however altered, since, despite being felt as a real experience of pleasure and gratification, it is artificially produced and its intensity differs from that of physiological pleasure. These altered feelings are stored in one’s memory and somehow integrated in the individual neuronal networks, so that they are eventually experienced as authentic. As a result, people are no longer able to tell the difference between alteration and reality, and their “ability to feel pleasure in normal conditions is significantly reduced. Drugs become then, little by little, the only source of pleasure.”⁵⁷

4. Scientific data

From an evolutionary viewpoint, pleasure plays a role of great importance in the life of an individual. It is in fact a key factor facilitating the evolution and survival of the *Homo* species. Studies

in neurosciences have shed light on the neurophysiological processes driving people to the constant search for pleasure, which translates into behaviours leading to feeding oneself, having sexual intercourse, engaging in relations with peers, etc. These actions are connected to the release of dopamine in several brain areas, among which also the orbitofrontal cortex, the anterior cingulate cortex, which communicates with the limbic system and oversees emotions, with the prefrontal cortex, the nucleus accumbens and the tegmental ventral area. This complex neurobiological system is (also) responsible for gratification.

Scientists argue that “all drugs act on this important cerebral system, triggering the release of great quantities of dopamine, hence a temporary feeling of intense pleasure.”⁵⁸ Although diverse, the pleasure stimuli produced by artificial—as much as damaging—neurochemical hyperstimulation encourage the organism to reiterate the experience. As a result, the brain activates a protective mechanism which lowers the production of endogenous dopamine and decreases the number of associated receptors. Therefore, “only drugs, in ever increasing doses, will be able to have brain synapses release the amount of dopamine required to have a feeling of wellbeing.”⁵⁹ While simplifying things to an extent, this is how an addiction starts and develops its well-known destructive consequences on the organism. Loosely paraphrasing Ivan Severi, one can claim that from the paradise of drugs people transition to the hell of drug addiction.⁶⁰

5. Conclusion

Although one might wonder whether some passages of this essay end up praising the use of drugs, its main goal is exactly the opposite. The aim was in fact to emphasize a highly ambiguous, self-contradictory, and very dangerous phenomenon. On the back of the promise of an artificially-induced pseudo-happiness, a destructive and destabilizing deceit is lurking. In the very moment of the perception of intentionally sought pleasure—efficiently sweeping away any boredom and insignificant daily life—life itself is slowly burnt away. Here lies the contradictory core of drug consumption and its devious deceit. Although thanks to intrinsic chemical properties drugs are associated with pleasure, which is a condition developed and matured along evolution to guarantee the survival of human beings and ultimately their life, instead of turning life on, they tend to progressively switch life off. Sometimes even in full awareness of their destructive power, but arrogantly enticed by the idea of being able to have the upper hand, people give in to the charming smile of drugs and venture on a journey whose destination is, to say the least, undetermined. This is how drugs win. First they seduce and then swallow up those dissatisfied lives with no consideration whatsoever.

After all, our society being based upon the extreme proliferation of false values, of disposable depersonalized relations, upon consumerism with no boundaries, on early sexuality, and on

emotional dulling, a distorted perception of reality is no surprise. This leads inevitably, according to Konrad Lorenz, to “dangerous disturbances of the pleasure-unpleasure experience economy,”⁶¹ which can be expressed in several ways, among which the tendency to mix up the aesthetic and moral values developed and consolidated in time with those illusory and faulty ones propounded by contemporary societies and mirroring the authentic ones. Through drugs, authentic pleasure is replaced by artificial pleasure, whose sole function is to anesthetize the widespread collective distress.⁶² Here we don’t speak about the classical problem of illusion as presented by Plato, but rather about a true misperception of the value system, inasmuch as the experience “is molded by shared historical, cultural, and material conditions” and provides “a basis for judgment.”⁶³

In this sense, a red flag is inevitably raised. A stable and solid system of values needs to be urgently reestablished, in order to provide people, especially young people, with a comforting and stimulating place. *Everyday Aesthetics*, together with other studies and activities capable of identifying the positive values of life, are well equipped, if included in educational programs developed to this aim, to provide the tools and keys required to read everyday life, re-educate effectively to values,⁶⁴ fill in the void in the education concerning feelings, support us in retrieving the pleasure of small things in life, credit the rightful value to life, and fostering a constructive and stimulating engagement with the future. Also, the inclusion in school curricular reading lists of texts connected to the issue (see the above-mentioned *Zoo Station: The Story of Christiane F.*, the anonymous drug addict report *Go ask Alice*,⁶⁵ Luigi Galimberti's *Morire di piacere*,⁶⁶ and Radek John's *Memento*⁶⁷) would prove effective in increasing youth awareness. In Italy, the Ministry for Education has released online the brochure *Cervello, mente e droghe*⁶⁸, which is meant to inform young people about the most up-to-date research findings on drug addiction and lay emphasis on life itself. To conclude, a strong need is felt to reactivate the original “feeling of life”⁶⁹ which allows to live fully and meaningfully.

¹ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, *Statistical Bulletin 2020*.

<https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/data/stats2020-en>.

² United Nations, Office on Drugs and Crime, *UNODC World Drug Report 2020: Global drug use rising; while COVID-19 has far reaching impact on global drug markets*, <https://unodc.org/unodc/press/releases/2020/June/media-advisory---global-launch-of-the-2020-world-drug-report.html>.

³ S. Freud, *Cocaine Papers* (Stonehill, New York, 1975). M. D. Staton, T. B. Todd, *The Family Therapy of Drug Abuse and Addiction* (Guilford Press, New York, 1982). J. Bergeret, *Lo psicoanalista in ascolto del tossicomane*, Borla, Milano, 1983.

⁴ P. Bourgois, *In Search of Respect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). D. Duprez, M. Kokoreff, *Les mondes de la drogue* (Paris: Editions Odile Jakob, 2000).

⁵ W. Benjamin, *On Hashish* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006). J. Derrida, *The Rhetoric of Drugs* (Betascript Publishing, 2010). M. Foucault, *Psychiatric Power* (Chicago: Arnold I. Davidson, 2006).

⁶ A. Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense. The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human Worldn* (Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2010), 158-159.

⁷ A. Berleant, *Reflections on the Aesthetics of Violence*. *Contemporary Aesthetics* Vol 7 (2019):

<https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=872>

⁸ U. Galimberti, *I vizi capitali e i nuovi vizi* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2005), 107 (my transl.).

⁹ J. H. Kupfer, *Experience as Art. Aesthetics in Everyday Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 41-65.

- ¹⁰ Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense*, 155-192.
- ¹¹ K. Mandoki, *Terror and Aesthetics: Nazi Strategies for Mass Organization*, in *Fascism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, vol. III, *Fascism and Culture*, Part 7: *Fascism as the Negation or Revolution of Culture*, edited by Roger Griffin (New York: Routledge, 2003), 21-38.
- ¹² Kupfer, *Experience as Art*, 67-86.
- ¹³ Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense*, 51.
- ¹⁴ See Kainowska, *Le nuove droghe fra gli anni Trenta e gli anni Sessanta*, http://www.kainowska.com/sito/storia-materiale-delle-droghe-parte-iv-di-6-___-le-nuove-droghe-fra-gli-anni-trenta-e-gli-anni-sessanta/
- ¹⁵ R. Merzner, R. Alpert, T. Leary, *Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York: Kensington, 2017).
- ¹⁶ See A. Escobotado, *A Brief History of Drugs* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1999).
- ¹⁷ Y. Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 236.
- ¹⁸ E. Di Stefano, *The Aesthetics of Coffee*, in *Aesthetic Literacy: a book for everyone*, vol. 2/3 (Melbourne: Mont Publishing, 2021) (forthcoming).
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CARCERAL AESTHETICS. ART AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN PRISON

Elisabetta Di Stefano

Abstract

The paper aims to focus on everyday life in prison following a double perspective, a historical and a contemporary one. First, the historical phenomenon of prison graffiti will be investigated in connection with one case study: the graffiti in the prisons of the Holy Office in Palermo. Subsequently, the effect of making art in today's prisons both on space and on inmate life will be taken into account. The overall aim of this twofold reading is to show to what extent making art in prison can be seen as a strategy of activation of those relational and familiarizing processes which bestow an aesthetic value on everyday life.

Keywords

Everyday Aesthetics; artification; carceral aesthetics; art in prison; graffiti.

1. Introduction

Is there a forgotten everyday life within Everyday Aesthetics? Originated at the start of the new millennium, the philosophical movement of Everyday Aesthetics aims to enhance the aesthetic value of everyday life.¹ Although several different areas have been explored, research in this field has mainly embraced the point of view of the western middle class and, therefore, lifestyles falling outside its cultural and socio-economic standards have been so far left out. Nevertheless, as Ossi Naukkarinen has pointed out,² everybody has their own everyday life, and this latter changes over the years, inasmuch as it is defined by a given time and a given space. Accordingly, even the daily life of marginal social groups can be interpreted from the viewpoint of aesthetic experience. This essay aims to focus on a theoretical question that might appear paradoxical: can we speak of aesthetics in reference to life inside prisons?

In order to address this question I will focus on what Nicole Fleetwood calls “carceral aesthetics,” in reference to the “production of art under conditions of unfreedom.”³ Although the phenomenon of artistic production – intentional or not – inside the prison has a long history, in this essay I will not discuss the quality of these works, nor their artistic acknowledgement within the traditional framework of aesthetics as philosophy of art. Quite the opposite, in view of Everyday Aesthetics, I will focus on the processes at stake, understanding “making art” as a way of living life in prison.

Prison detention is a period of suspension from normal everyday life. Since the 18th century, the deprivation of freedom, of moments connected to affectivity and relations, of family space has been the core sentence prisoners must serve for crimes committed to the detriment of society.⁴ However, even the life of inmates has its own routine, with its clear spaces and rhythms, and therefore this lends itself to an interpretation from the viewpoint of Everyday Aesthetics. Making the point of a debate started between 1990 and 2000, Yuriko Saito⁵ states that aesthetics must not be understood only in honorific and positive terms. Also “negative aesthetics”⁶ exists.

The subject is very broad and can be approached from a historical and diachronic perspective or from a contemporary and synchronic perspective. The historical perspective is a field for which Anglo-American aesthetics has little interest, as it does not match its mainly analytical approach. It is nevertheless rich in developments when investigated through the lens of Everyday Aesthetics.

Also based on a contemporary perspective, Everyday Aesthetics is able to provide important contributions to the current scientific debate and namely, provide theoretical models which allow us to aesthetically reassess life in prison, and thus inform research and action-oriented projects envisaging the direct involvement of inmates.

This essay will attempt to keep these two lines, the diachronic and the synchronic line, together, as its goal is not to develop an exhaustive account, but rather to simply outline a research methodology and a field of study yet to be explored. First, the historical phenomenon of prison graffiti will be investigated in connection with one case study: the graffiti in the prisons of the Holy Office in Palermo. Subsequently, the effect of making art in today’s prisons both on space and on inmate life will be taken into account.

The overall aim of this twofold reading – historical and contemporary – is to show to what extent making art in prison can be seen as a strategy of activation of those relational and familiarizing processes which bestow an aesthetic value on everyday life. An “aesthetics of the familiar” comes here to the fore. However, while employing this expression, I do not call upon Yuriko Saito’s theory and her book of the same title.⁷ It is there sustained, in fact, that, in order to have an aesthetic appreciation of everyday life, one has to “defamiliarize the familiar,” that is to say, making extraordinary what is trivial and taken for granted. On the contrary, I aim to show that by making art together one can make even a strange space feel “familiar” and create forms of community. This strategy of familiarization of the extraneous (i.e., the prison cell and human relations in prison) can bestow aesthetic value on the life of inmates and sometimes make them better people.

2. Graffiti in prisons: a historical perspective.

Prison graffiti – a term used here as a collective label including both actual graffiti and wall drawings and writings – is a particular form of writing on walls and also one of the most

recurrent writing methods in history.⁸ In fact, graffiti, drawings and writings are frequently found on the walls of secular and ecclesiastical prisons and on the walls of the dungeons of towers and castles in various parts of the world.⁹ Here, we will focus on the graffiti of the prisons of the Spanish Holy Office in Palermo, since with its cells distributed over two floors, it is an excellent example of this particular type of graffiti. These graffiti can be found in the Steri¹⁰ – named after the *Hosterium* – the “fortified palace,” expropriated from the Chiaramonte family, where from 1600 to 1782 the Tribunal of the Holy Inquisition was active. Despite the reports and declarations of some authoritative scholars,¹¹ municipal authorities have paid little attention to these graffiti, which have been plastered over every time the building has changed its intended use. Only in the years 2000–2007 with the restoration of both the detention cells and the dungeons was the phenomenon brought to light in its entirety and complexity.¹²

Although admired today by tourists and visitors, the graffiti should not be seen as works of art, even when they display some artistic and literary merit.¹³ These are not quickly made, clandestine graffiti, like those of contemporary street artists, but works that took time – they must have been tolerated by the jailers – and transformed the prison space.

As a philosophical discipline Everyday Aesthetics takes distance from the artistic object and it effectively shifts the philosophical focus on everyday actions and environments. I will therefore attempt to account for prison graffiti based on the following key elements: time, space, and community making.

In prison, time passes slowly, excessively slowly, and the daily action of writing or drawing becomes a survival strategy in order not to go mad. In reality, the repeated daily activities – which for Kevin Melchionne are the object of study of Everyday Aesthetics¹⁴ – do not always have alienating consequences. Repeating the same gestures serves to release the tension built up by anxiety or stress, or to regain self-control in moments of panic; consequently, according to Melchionne, inasmuch as it is psychologically soothing, a positive value can be credited to repetition.¹⁵

The daily act of writing or drawing inside the prison can be understood precisely within this framework. Deprived of freedom and of the possibility of communicating externally, prisoners find that writing and drawing is a way to pull themselves together as subjects,¹⁶ to reaffirm their own identity, which civil society instead wants to forget and erase; consequently, graffiti is a means of resistance, of release and consolation. The walls of the cells become the support on which the prisoners leave a sign of their existence. By engraving their name, they reclaim their denied identity. The representation of objects and practices connected to their daily, professional or devotional life serves the same purpose. Frequent subjects are, for example, boats, weapons, saints, and crucifixes. It has been remarked that the drawings are repetitive. This repetition confirms that drawing in this context is not an exercise of imagination or a practice of

artistic production, but rather a language through which one's own story is told. And these are stories of ordinary life. In this respect graffiti have been defined as "speech(less) acts."¹⁷ Through these simple gestures, prisoners could express their pain and suffering. But they are also a way of measuring time, transforming a hostile space into a familiar one, and creating forms of community inside the prison.

Time is a key element in Everyday Aesthetics. Its contributions have indeed focused both on ordinary and routine moments and on extraordinary and special moments, as well as on the relationship between the two.¹⁸ Although the time of imprisonment is a suspended time, a bracketing of ordinary life, prison detention also has its own rhythms. Prisoners do not fail to leave traces of their ordinary life – recording a change of cell, the deterioration of water quality, the harshness of prison conditions – and those moments that we could call "extra-ordinary" – to paraphrase Leddy with a negative inversion – because particularly hard and dramatic. One can then also record interrogations, tortures, or the event of the *autodafé* (act of faith), that is to say, the solemn proclamation of the inquisitor's sentence, followed by a public ceremony of abjuration or sentencing of the heretic to burn on the stake.

For prisoners, counting the days that pass is a routine action which helps them not to lose the orientation of time. When prisoners know the day of the month and the month of the year, they write it down with extreme precision next to their drawings, or else the measurement of time is achieved by marking vertical lines crossed (or under marked) lengthwise on the wall. An unusual "artistic" calendar which identifies the days with the image of the corresponding patron saint was found in the prisons of Palermo. It was probably carried out by the cleric and scholar Francesco Baronio, imprisoned in 1647 for having participated in the anti-Spanish revolt that year. Thanks to his theological training, this prisoner could in fact identify the days through religious festivities. He then created a personal liturgical calendar that took into account official celebrations but also popular devotions.¹⁹ Usually calendars differentiate the extra-ordinary days of the festivities - devoted to rest and (for believers) prayer - from the working days. Instead, in Baronio's liturgical calendar there is no distinction between festivities and ordinary days, as in prison every day is the same as the next. Baronio's calendar can be interpreted in the light of everyday aesthetics not so much because it is an iconographic calendar, but above all because the drawings of the saints provide a visual support to the prayer that marks the rhythm of the days, offering consolation to the suffering prisoners. Thanks to this "artistic" way of measuring time, a dark, humid and unhealthy cell can become a comfortable place in the spiritual sense of the word.

As a result, prison graffiti are an important tool for transforming space and could be seen as a peculiar phenomenon of artification. In the last decade, artification has been understood to

indicate the transformation of something that is not art into art according to different theoretical perspectives.

The French sociologists Shapiro and Heinich²⁰ have assessed artification as a dynamic process by means of which objects and practices are given artistic legitimation by several social actors (i.e., critics, institutions, markets, audiences) and, among various examples, they also mention graffiti and wall paintings. Based on this reading, one could claim that prison graffiti have been the object of a process of artification, inasmuch as nowadays they are often appreciated by tourists within museum exhibitions. However, closer to the goal of this essay, the theorists of Everyday Aesthetics have developed a different concept of artification, understood as the transformation of environments and behaviors which, through art, can improve the quality of our daily life.

In particular, Thomas Leddy has distinguished a superficial kind of artification, which transforms the space in a decorative sense, and a deep one, which affects people and behaviors. Although in reference to contemporary practices, Leddy interprets graffiti as “a shallower form of artification,”²¹ in the case of prison graffiti, what is at stake is not making the cell artistically and aesthetically pleasing. In fact, these graffiti should not be understood as works of art or as decorations like the murals that revive blighted urban spaces. By depicting objects, habits, and moments of everyday life, the images make an extraneous space look familiar.

Arto Haapala and Yuriko Saito have focused on the concept of familiarity in order to emphasize the positive value of an idea usually connected to something trivial, routine, and consequently not worthy of aesthetic consideration.²² In an extra-ordinary but negative situation, prison graffiti show how what is familiar can transform a hostile space and make it more comfortable. This transformation of the space through writings and drawings is an act of deep artification, which not only affects the psychological and emotional state of inmates, but also activates relational processes and creates forms of community. By writing on the walls, the prisoners “appropriate” the space, communicating their emotions, their history, or expressing their religious beliefs. Furthermore, this action has consequences for some groups of people. In particular, drawing a sacred image becomes a “foundational” gesture for a community identifying itself as such through the rite of prayer. In fact, according to Christian doctrine, saints share their faith with believers and intercede for them with God, by virtue of that communion – according to an article of the Apostles’ Creed – which makes saints and believers members of the same family, namely part of the mystical body of the resurrected Christ.

Although graffiti, writings and drawings are found in all places of detention and punishment, in the prisons of the Holy Office, sacred images recur more often than elsewhere because it is a tribunal of faith, created to prosecute heresy. At that time, when religious sentiment was strong and devotional practices scrupulously observed, the images of the saints had the power

to generate poles of attraction and create forms of community finding comfort in prayer. In public places of the city votive shrines, placed at crossroads or in small alleys, protect the community that gathers there to pray. Likewise in prison devotional images transform the cell into a “sacred space,” a meeting place where ceremonies and ritual acts can be hosted.²³

However, even non-devotional graffiti have a similar transformative power on space and people. By leaving their mark on the walls, individuals rejected by society no longer feel alone and marginalized, but become part of a “textual community”²⁴ that unites authors and readers in shared suffering. In fact, writing and drawing on prison walls activates a polyphony of voices including other contemporary, previous and subsequent witnesses, and establishing a dialogue even between prisoners who have never met. The production of graffiti thus becomes a strategy to rediscover a new and different sense of life in the hell of prison.

3. Making art in prison in the contemporary era

Moving to the contemporary world, I will attempt to apply the same tools of Everyday Aesthetics employed for the historical account. One should bear in mind, however, that, whereas the graffiti of the Holy Office sacralised the space and created a community of prayer, nowadays the artistic production of inmates has lost this devotional dimension, and is mainly connected to educational projects approved by penal institutions. Once more, my goal is not to focus on the artistic quality of the so produced works of art, nor on the acknowledgement of their artistic value in the Art World, but rather on how making art can be a way of creating a community and activate relational strategies with a positive impact on the life of inmates. Prison detention is no longer considered a form of punishment but of rehabilitation. Consequently, whereas in the past spending life without aesthetic stimuli was considered part of the sentence, today there is a tendency to favor the practice of those artistic activities (visual arts, music, singing, theatre, and creative writing as well) that can offer compensatory aesthetic stimuli to the state of deprivation and isolation in which inmates live.²⁵

Responding to the human need for creative self-development, autonomy, and self-expression, artistic activity reduces the level of aggression and promotes focus on achieving certain goals. Furthermore, it allows inmates to gain greater confidence with the possibility of introducing change in their lives. Artistic activities therefore prove effective in rehabilitation programs. They provide useful skills for the reintegration into society²⁶ and help individuals develop self-control in overcoming violent instincts. In fact if these instincts persist, they can compromise relational life even long after their release.²⁷ This is why programs envisaging the involvement of inmates in artistic projects are strongly promoted both by the institutions of the European Union²⁸ and in the United States of America.²⁹ In US prisons, precise guidelines even regulate the production,

distribution and sale of works of art created by inmates.³⁰ However, the existing scholarly literature focuses above all on the psychological, therapeutic and educational effects of making art. A philosophical account investigating prison life in terms of its aesthetic quality is still missing. In other words, an inquiry that pinpoints, for example, the negative effects of “aesthetic deprivation”³¹ and the positive consequences of “aesthetic engagement”³² still needs to be explored.

Not being able to deal completely with such a vast and complex topic here, I will simply try to point to a line of investigation. I wish to apply the same interpretative tools used above, on the historical and diachronic level – namely, space, time, and community making – on the contemporary and synchronic level.

In this respect, Yuriko Saito’s thoughts on the artification³³ of the workplace are particularly to the point. In fact, Saito remarks how a pleasant environment has direct repercussions on the well-being of workers and therefore on their productivity. The same can be said for prison space, where artistic projects aimed at creating colourful paintings and murals have proved effective in achieving therapeutic and rehabilitative goals.³⁴ As we have already mentioned in the case of prison graffiti, the realization of murals in prisons is not merely decorative, inasmuch as, by transforming the space, it affects individuals. It can therefore be seen as a form of deep artification, according to Leddy’s distinction mentioned above.

In reality, prison space is not only the architectural form made up of high walls, bars on windows and small cells. From a phenomenological point of view also the “atmospheric” space should be taken into account. According to the input provided by the philosopher Gernot Böhme, the atmospheric space is the result of the motor and synaesthetic relationship that the perceiving subject establishes with the perceived environment.³⁵ When we apply this concept to space in prisons, it is clear that the atmosphere connected to serving a sentence is made up of silence, screams, the screeching of bars, oppressive smells and above all of isolation.³⁶ Isolation is a defining element of the “atmosphere of punishment” and characterizes both the space and the time spent in prison, with all the psychological consequences deriving from it in terms of alienation, stress and the deprivation of needs; all these consequences can persist and affect relationships and life in general, even after release.

Isolation is made up of invisible barriers. In fact, as Fleetwood points out, “penal space” is not just an architectural concept, but also refers to “the disruption of family relations and domestic space.”³⁷ By reporting on interviews with inmates and stories shared by them and their relatives, Fleetwood shows to what extent art, understood as relational practices, dismantles barriers and builds up connections. After reviewing several artistic projects carried out in prisons in the United States, she concludes that such relational practices are effective “to forge community with other incarcerated people, to communicate with nonincarcerated allies and the

public, to connect with relatives and loved ones, and to cultivate subject positions that cannot be eviscerated or fully managed by the carceral status.”³⁸

Furthermore, isolation also affects time. Whereas time for inmates is suspended, mainly defined by waiting times (e.g., waiting for the next visit, for the end of the sentence, etc.) and punctuated by the rhythms of the prison, for the inmates’ families and friends time goes on: they find a job, they get married, they start a family, they move elsewhere. As a result, those who get out of prison encounter a family and friend environment that is different from the one they had left. Often ex-prisoners experience difficulties in re-entering society from a professional and relational point of view, and keep feeling a condition of isolation. From this perspective, making art turns out not only to be a way to compensate for that state of aesthetic deprivation that characterizes prison life, but also a sort of aesthetic engagement, opposing resistance to the state of isolation. Displaying or selling works of art, performing with musical instruments, in plays, or public readings of prose and poetry offers inmates the opportunity to engage in productive exchanges with the community before and after their release.³⁹ Although they are not professional artists, this aesthetic engagement has a transformative power on them. It is capable of turning ordinary life in prison into an extraordinary moment of glory. Inmates cease to be a number; they become famous inside and sometimes even outside prison. This helps fuel their self-esteem and self-awareness and, in some cases, reveals artistic skills that could be practiced at a professional level after their release.

Nevertheless, the expression “making art” should not be taken restrictively in reference to the art system, but also widely according to John Dewey’s understanding of it. In *Art as Experience*,⁴⁰ Dewey’s account is prompted by a naturalistic theory. Human beings are seen as organisms radically dependent on the environment in which they live and in which they develop natural, social, and cultural interactions – both with the environment and with other human beings – that are essential to life itself. Consequently, every experience – not only that of artwork – is “aesthetic,” inasmuch as the organism experiences pain or pleasure while interacting with the environment to which it belongs and to which it is exposed. As a result, the notion of art adopted by Dewey, in line with his pragmatist philosophy, is not that of a finished product handed over to aesthetic contemplation – as the 18th-century theory of the system of fine arts would have it – but rather a – not necessarily artistic – praxis and the way to realize a better life in interaction with the environment.

By making art together, inmates feel part of a community within which they are recognized and appreciated. Therefore, making art in prison can be interpreted as a relational strategy, that fosters friendship among inmates and sometimes even between inmates and prison

staff or educators (art teachers)⁴¹ and restores that family and domestic dimension that prison isolation tends to break.

4. Conclusion

The art produced in prison has often been seen as a strategy of consolation and of survival. One might want to think about the so-called “prison literature,”⁴² mainly featuring letters and memoirs, less often narrative texts; to this, one should add the production of small objects and also the production of graffiti and mural paintings. This artistic production, previously achieved with improvised tools, has seen a continuous increase in the contemporary world. Nowadays there are many artistic projects carried out by inmates, independently or under the guidance of professionals (artists, educators).

Extensive scientific literature – produced by criminologists, neurobiologists, psychologists and educators – is already available. However, it examines therapeutic and rehabilitative aspects; a full investigation on the aesthetic quality of inmate life is still missing. *Everyday Aesthetics* is best suited to fill this gap thanks to its pragmatic and ameliorative declination deriving from its roots in Dewey’s approach. *Everyday Aesthetics* can offer a theoretical framework for multi-disciplinary research and action-oriented projects foreseeing the involvement of staff and prisoners.⁴³

According to Dewey, making art is a relational practice, namely a way to realize a special and enlivening experience in the interaction with the environment and others. In relation to prison life this goal can be pursued by means of an aesthetic engagement aiming at “familiarizing the extraneous.” This aesthetic engagement can develop along three directions. First, it can make a hostile space feel familiar and make it more comfortable. Then it can give rhythm to time by means of daily rituals. It is a fact that the quality of life – i.e., the possibility to feel well or feel bad – revolves around ritualized gestures reassuring people and making them feel part of a community. This is the sense of the “positive repetition” emphasized by Melchionne. Finally, the aesthetic engagement can develop in collaborative and relational activities. These produce connections, create communities, and can change the life of prisoners not only within prison but possibly also after their release.

This topic is huge and it cannot be dealt with in a complete way here; however, it is possible to trace a forgotten, or better, not yet explored road within *Everyday Aesthetics*.

¹ Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Yuriko Saito, “Aesthetics of the Everyday”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-of-everyday/> (last view: 24 June 2021).

² Ossi Naukkarinen, “What is ‘Everyday’ in Everyday Aesthetics?”, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, n. 11, 2013. <https://contemporaryaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=675> (last view: 24-06-2021)

³ Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Marking Time. Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (Cambridge, Mass.-London, England: Harvard University Press 2020), 25.

⁴ Within the scope of criminal law, prison was not contemplated as a sentence in itself until the 18th century. Previously it was the place where the accused awaited judgment and the convicted awaited the execution of the sentence. Fernando J. Burillo Albacete, *El nacimiento de la pena privativa de libertad. Siglos XVI-XX* (Madrid: E.DER.SA, 1999).

⁵ Saito, “Aesthetics of the Everyday,” par. 4 titled *Negative Aesthetics*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-of-everyday/> (last view: 24-06-2021).

⁶ In his book *Estetiikka* (2000) the Finnish scholar Aarne Kinnunen was among the first to reflect on negative aesthetics. In this line see the subsequent contributions by Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010) and *Aesthetics Beyond the Arts: New and Recent Essays* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012); Katya Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007).

⁷ Yuriko Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar. Everyday Life and World-Making* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017).

⁸ On the graffiti in places of confinement (not just prisons) see the large report with examples and references by Giovanna Fiume, “Soundless Screams. Graffiti and Drawings in the Prisons of the Holy Office in Palermo”, *Journal of Early Modern History* n. 21/3, 2017, 88-215.

⁹ For the rich literature on prison writings, see the following studies: William Zammit, *Printing in Malta, 1642-1839. Its Cultural Role from Inception to the Granting of Freedom of the Press* (Malta: Gutemberg Press, 2008); Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Brian A. Harrison, *The Tower of London Prisoner Book. A Complete Chronology of the Persons Known to have been Detained at Their Majesties Pleasure 1100-1941* (Leeds: Royal Armouries 2004).

¹⁰ Today it is the seat of the Rectorate of the University of Palermo.

¹¹ Among them Giuseppe Pitrè, senator of the Kingdom and historian of folk traditions, and the writer Leonardo Sciascia. Giuseppe Pitrè, Leonardo Sciascia, *Urla senza suono. Graffiti e disegni dei prigionieri dell’Inquisizione* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1999).

¹² Giovanna Fiume, Mercedes García-Arenal (eds.), *Parole prigioniere. I graffiti delle carceri del Santo Ufficio di Palermo* (Palermo: Istituto Poligrafico Europeo, 2018), 9-10.

¹³ There are also poetic compositions (sonnets, lyrics in Sicilian or Italian) that echo literary texts such as Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno* and show “an intimate relationship between incarceration and literary invention, prison and poetry.” This is why the prison has been seen as a “Muses abitation,” in relation to the many poets hosted in it, and therefore as a site of cultural production. Molly Murray, “Measured Sentences: Forming Literature in the Early Modern Prison,” *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 72, n. 2 2009, 147-167, in part.147.

¹⁴ Kevin Melchionne, “The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics”, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, n. 11, 2013, (<https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=663>) (last view: 24 June 2021).

¹⁵ Kevin Melchionne, “The Point of Everyday Aesthetics”, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, n. 12, 2014, (<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/ca/7523862.0012.017/--point-of-everyday-aesthetics?rgn=main;view=fulltext>) (last view: 24 June 2021).

¹⁶ Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, 41-42.

¹⁷ Johann Petitjean, “Inscribing, Writing and Drawing in the Prisons of the Inquisition: methodological issues and research perspectives on graffiti”, *Quaderni storici* n. 157, 2018, 15-37.

¹⁸ Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Peterborough (ON): Broadview Press, 2012); Yuriko Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar. Everyday Life and World-Making*.

¹⁹ Valeria La Motta, *Prigionieri senza causa di fede. Il caso di Francesco Baronio Manfredi*, in Fiume, García-Arenal (eds.), *Parole prigioniere*, 257-290, in part. 286.

²⁰ Roberta Shapiro & Nathalie Heinrich, “When is Artification?”, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, n. 4, 2012, edited by Y. Saito and O. Naukkarinen (<https://contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=639>). (last view 24 May 2021)

²¹ Thomas Leddy, “Aesthetization, Artification, and Aquariums”, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, n. 4, 2012, article n. 6 edited by Y. Saito and O. Naukkarinen part. I, 1 (https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/volo/iss4/6?utm_source=digitalcommons.risd.edu%2Fliberalarts_contempaesthetics%2Fvolo%2Fiss4%2F6&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages) (last view 24 May 2021).

²² Arto Haapala, “On the Aesthetics of Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness and Meaning of Place”, in Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (eds.), *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 39-55; Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*.

²³ Giovanna Fiume, *Visibile parlare. Scritte e disegni delle carceri segrete*, in Fiume, García-Arenal (eds.), *Parole prigioniere*, 207.

²⁴ Ruth Ahnert, *The Rise of Prison Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 29-42.

²⁵ Przemyslaw Piotrowski and Stefan Florek, “Science of Art in Prison”, in Tadeusz Marian Ostrowski, Iwona Sikorska, and Krzysztof Gerc (eds.), *Resilience and Health in a Fast-Changing World*, (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2015) 93-106. On music, see Mary L. Cohen’s contributions, in particular: “Choral Singing and Prison Inmates: Influences of Performing in a Prison Choir I”, *Journal of Correctional Education*, Vol. 60, No. 1, 2009, 52-65.

²⁶ Lee Michael Johnson, “A Place for Art in Prison: Art as a Tool for Rehabilitation and Management”, *Southwest Journal of Criminal Justice*, 5 (2), 2008, 100-120, in part. 100.

²⁷ Janine Blacker, Andy Watson, Anthony R. Beech, “A Combined Drama-Based and CBT Approach to Working with Self-Reported Anger Aggression”, *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health*, 18, 2008, 129-37.

²⁸ See Jo Hawley, Ilona Murphy, Manuel Souto-Otero, *Prison Education and Training in Europe. Current state-of-play and challenges. A summary report authored for the European Commission by GHK consulting. European Commission* (2013).

²⁹ See the essay by Larry Brewster and its extensive reference list: Larry Brewster, “The Impact of Prison Arts Programs on Inmate Attitudes and Behavior: A Quantitative Evaluation”, *Justice Policy Journal*, Vol. 11, 2 (2004), 1-28.

³⁰ Fleetwood, *Marking Time*, 8.

- ³¹ Hilary Moss and Desmond O’Neill (“Aesthetic deprivation in clinical settings”, *The Lancet*, 22 March 2014) draw attention to the negative impact of aesthetic deprivation in hospital settings. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)60507-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)60507-9/fulltext) (last view 24 July 2021).
- ³² Arnold Berleant, “What is Aesthetic Engagement?”, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, n. 11, 2013. https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol11/iss1/5/ (last view 24 July 2021).
- ³³ Yuriko Saito, “Everyday Aesthetics and Artification”, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, n. 4, 2012. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/ca/7523862.spec.405/--everyday-aesthetics-and-artification?rgn=main;view=fulltext>. (last view 30 July 2021).
- ³⁴ One example is provided by the projects “The Labyrinth of Freedom” and “The Horizon of Freedom”, for which inmates had to create murals on the topic of freedom. Przemyslaw Piotrowski, Zbigniew Bajek, Stefan Florek, “The Artistic Statements of Inmates about Freedom: the ‘Labyrinth of Freedom’ Project and Its Possible Applications”, *Art Inquiry. Recherches sur les arts*, XV (XXIV) 2013, 213-229.
- ³⁵ Gernot Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*, (London-Oxford-New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).
- ³⁶ On the atmosphere of prisons, see Molly McPee’s essay on a theatre piece staging it: Molly McPee, *Miasmas in the theatre: Encountering carceral atmospherics in Pests* (2014), “Ambiances” 6, 2020, <https://journals.openedition.org/ambiances/3698> (last view 10 September 2021).
- ³⁷ Fleetwood, *Marking Time*, 38.
- ³⁸ Fleetwood, *Marking time*, 255.
- ³⁹ Johnson, “A place for art in prison”, 107.
- ⁴⁰ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Press, 1958).
- ⁴¹ Fleetwood, *Marking Time*, 18.
- ⁴² See Thomas S. Freeman, “The Rise of Prison Literature” and Rivkah Zim, “Writing behind Bars: Literary Context and the Authority of Carceral Experience”, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 72, n. 2 2009 (special issue), 33–146 and 291–311.
- ⁴³ Following this line, I am interested in some art projects that are being developed in Palermo. See <https://acrobazie.org/larte-della-liberta/> (and the catalogue *L’arte della libertà. Diario di un modello inclusivo*, edited by Elisa Fulco and Antonio Leone, Acrobazie Edizioni 2020) and a project carried out by the University of Palermo: *GAP. Graffiti Art in Prison* (2021).

SHELL, SHELTER AND SURFACE: THE TRANSFORMATIVE AESTHETICS OF CARS

Scott Andrew Elliott

Abstract

As an introduction to this issue, this article touches on the topics addressed in the other articles. It discusses the transformations of the body that come about through interactions and integrations with the car. The capacity for speed offers a transformative opportunity, creating a velocitized body that relates to landscapes in a new way. Also discussed is the separation that comes about through the car's interiority and shell-like qualities, which offers shelter from outside threats and transforms social relations between individuals. Recent examples of drive-thru Covid testing and a drive-thru art exhibition illustrate how the protective quality of the car, and the separation it entails, was taken advantage of by both hospitals and art galleries.

Keywords

Body, Transformation, Embodiment, Phenomenology, Velocity, Sexuality.

1. Introduction

Last year I spent hundreds of hours commuting to and from work. The roundtrip was between 200 and 300 kilometers each day, and the majority of the distance was on highway 401 which holds the record for busiest highway in North America (and arguably busiest in the world, though many countries do not record such data). I nearly crashed twice, I saw two cars engulfed in flames on the side of the road, a transport truck container ripped in half, and two identical black pickup trucks in a collision. Much of my commuting time was spent moving below 10km/hour, when I would try not to fall asleep. Commuting was my only time alone that year, and I began to see my car as if I were a hermit crab taking on a temporary shell. I could hide there, escape into its interior safety, as I had in my childhood while waiting for my father to return from a work meeting or other appointment where I would feel uncomfortable. The steel, plastic and glass offered an effective separation from the world that I could retreat into. This retreat was cathartic, as last year I was recovering from the end of my marriage and adjusting to my return to Canada after 15 years abroad. Within this shell I could have private moments of desperate weeping as well as screaming rages without the social repercussions such expressions would have in other places surrounded by

as many people. If someone happened to see my expression while driving, it was a transitory encounter as the continuing flow of traffic swept us apart.

These hours spent in my car were filled with life, yet commuting is somehow a time separate from living, time we feel has been lost or taken away from what we prioritize as our real lives, the activities and relationships we attempt to focus our energies on. The separation that driving a car invokes may be somewhat straightforward to note, but along with this separation come transformations that are not so straightforward. This introductory text attempts to introduce some ideas about this relationship between person and car with the aim to parse out the particularities of these transformations through discussions of sensorial experiences and symbolic social interactions. The articles that follow explore some of these aforementioned topics, through aesthetics of the car in a number of examples. They also demonstrate the integration of cars with our understandings of gender, identity, and culture, through the sensorial material experience of these car aesthetics as well as through the symbolism that is applied in a process of social identification. The sensorial experience of cars is explored in a creative work by Jondi Keane, offering an example of artistic research through drawing and creative writing. The aesthetics of the appearance of the car and its materials inside and out, and how these are gendered both by those who modify their vehicles and by those who build and market them to consumers, is explored in Angela Cope's *Colour Pops, New Car Smells: The Feminization of Saran before Saran Wrap*. The car (or truck) as symbol of the individual and representative of a local culture is addressed in Megan Greene's *The Motor Vehicle: A Musing on The Aesthetics of The Canadian Oil Sands*, where images of particular trucks and their modifications are used in popular culture to represent a people and a place.

My own interest in this relationship between person and car came about through this year of long commutes, which I looked forward to as a cathartic retreat into a mobile architectural shell. This commuting time offered me a chance to be alone, between a house full of my multi-generational extended family and my work on film sets with a hundred colleagues. Henri Lefebvre suggested that the commute is a 'constrained time' of life, similar to the office Christmas party or other such compulsory work-related event, as it is unpaid time we must sacrifice to maintain our employment. Yet this may be an enabling constraint, as it creates an interstitial phase between work and home identities as well as a dissociation from the surrounding environment. As such, it might offer an opportunity for a necessary remediation. In *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, Kristin Ross writes,

The commute [...] has become the respite, the retreat. A miraculous object, the car can compensate for the destruction it has created—it can protect the driver and offer solace from the conditions it has helped create. In this the automobile follows the established order of the capitalism of which it is the twentieth-century emblem; for the established order of capitalism, as Mark Angenot points out, only subsists by repeating ‘I didn’t want that,’ and by looking around in the disarray it has wrought for the means to restabilize. In the later compensatory myths of the car it is its protected interior space that takes on value, its quasi-domestic (but also anti-domestic) function: a home away from home, a place for solitude or intimacy.¹

Rather than a non-site moving within a timeless space, the experience of the commute offers us what we lack in our daily lives. This moment of obligatory constraint, living through the traffic jams created by our conflicting desires for suburban lifestyle and city careers, throws upon us self-reflection, a chance for daydreams and fantasies, or a cathartic release of emotions either inwards or outwards towards other cars and drivers.

2. Shell and shelter, extension and transformation

Through selection of fabrics, patterns, materials and advertising strategies (further explored in Angela Cope’s article in this issue, ‘*Color Pops, New Car Smells*’), the car interior has extended comfort into this ‘quasi-domestic’ mobile architecture that we retreat into as if a shell of protection. This is furthered by the safety mechanisms implemented, from airbags to cameras, in order to offer that essential architectural function of shelter. The interior of the car is heated, air conditioned, softened with various types of foam, and surfaces are designed to be pleasing to multiple sense modalities. In order to achieve a sensorial separation from the exterior world, sound insulation is used to dampen road noise and so offers the potential for the driver to customize their interior soundscape. In 1924, Kelley’s Motors installed its first car radio, and since then listening to music while driving has become an essential part of being in a car.

*Here in my car
I feel safest of all
I can lock all my doors
It's the only way to live in cars.
Here in my car
I can only receive*

*I can listen to you
It keeps me stable for days in cars.
Here in my car
Where the image breaks down
Will you visit me please
If I open my door in cars
Here in my car
You know I've started to think
About leaving tonight
Although nothing seems right in cars.²*

I was in traffic in London once and had a problem with some people in front. They tried to beat me up and get me out of the car. I locked the doors and eventually drove up on the pavement and got away from them ... It explains how you can feel safe inside a car in the modern world, which is probably why you get things like road rage. When you're in it, your whole mentality is different, in a car. It's like your own little personal empire with four wheels on it.³

This domestic quality of the direct experience of the interior also leads to a change in our relations to other drivers. Their humanity is reduced while we are both driving on the road. The social relations between drivers are greatly different from those not mediated by the metal, plastic and glass of the car. Road rage might be the clearest example of this difference, when we act aggressively in response to our assumed anonymity while driving. Matthew B. Crawford writes that '[w]e feel free to yell curses at others while driving that we never would on a sidewalk. And of course, there is more reason for cursing on a motorway, as others in *their* private cars are very much in one's way. Where previously the street had the character of a commons, it is now a place of *competition* for something scarce: street capacity.'⁴ This quality of shell and shelter offered by the insular qualities of the car lead to transformations of our ways of perceiving and interacting with the world, as it increases our capacities for motion, and changes our manners of relating to landscape and other people.

Despite being designed to allow panoramic vision of the surrounding environment with large windows, to allow egress through multiple doors, the thin separation between interior and exterior serves to build an impermeable if not impenetrable shelter. The separation is one of contradictions as the mobility of the car affords access to landscapes and locations yet protects from those visited environments. This separation is illusory, but it does serve to recast embodied perceptions. The phenomenological and psychological dichotomy of this separation may echo what Gaston Bachelard describes as ‘shelter’:

whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter [...] the imagination [will] build ‘walls’ of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection—or, just the contrary, tremble behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts. In short, in the most interminable of dialectics, the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter.⁵

The shelter of the car operates as a kind of architecture to both enclose and protect the body while creating the exterior world as a separate sphere. Perhaps it is a combination of the safety mechanisms, the physical durability of the enclosure, paired with the sound isolation and interior climate control that establishes the architectural quality of an interior environment.

3. Cars and Covid-19

During the recent Covid-19 pandemic, this shell-like protective quality of the car became entangled with the requirement to separate oneself from other people and perhaps that uncontrollable world outside one’s bubble. Some Covid testing locations were drive-thru operations to avoid transmission of the virus in waiting lines. I visited one when I had some symptoms of the illness. The parking lot location was repurposed with new white lines painted over the yellow parking spot demarcations in order to corral the arriving patients into a systematized array of waiting lines. Two tents were built on the parking lot, the first for taking a patient’s information, the second for the test. The degree to which the window was rolled down was a concern for the nurses, instructions were given for this as well as for how to withdraw one’s facemask from one’s nose but still cover one’s mouth. Signage was prevalent throughout; all motions of car and driver were choreographed.

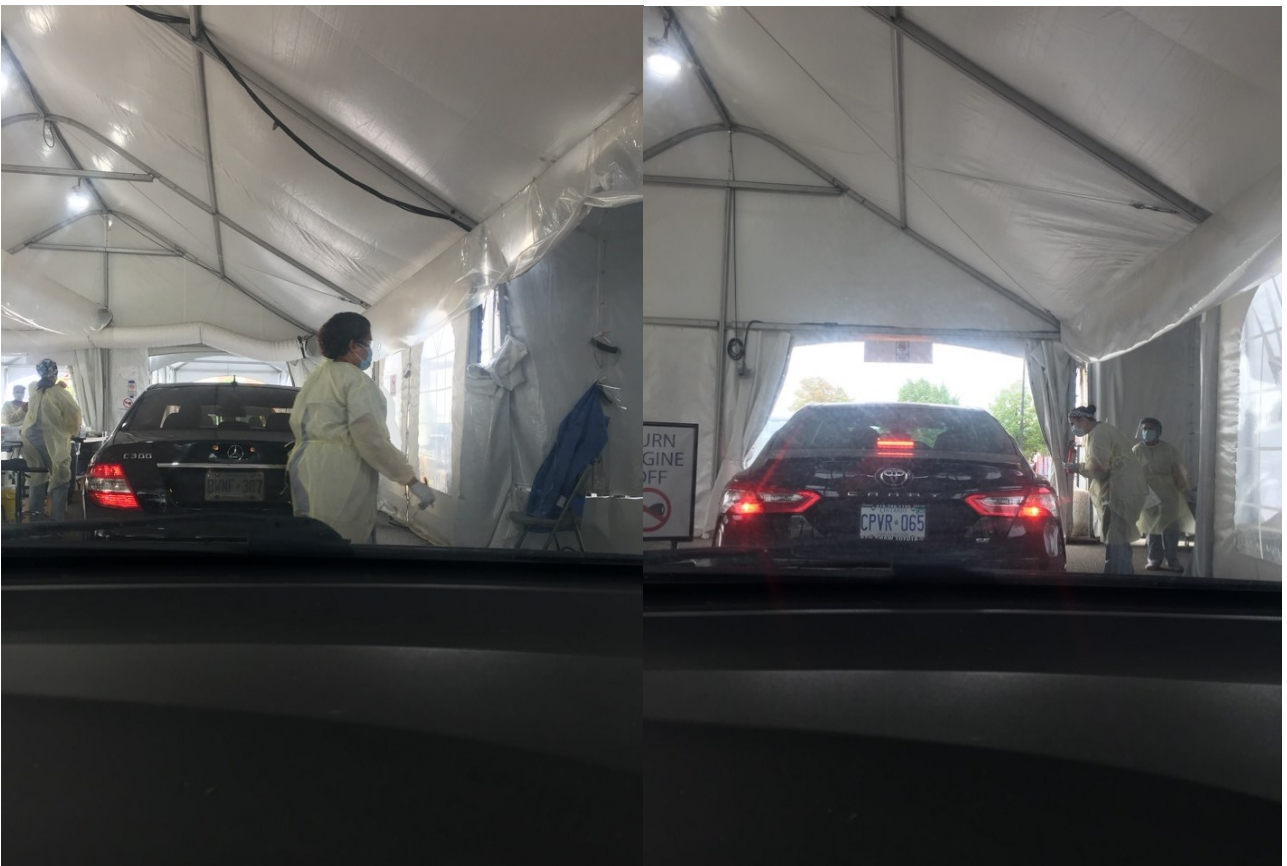


Fig. 1 and 2: Drive-thru Covid-19 test at the Etobicoke General Hospital, Canada, April 2020. Photos by author.



Fig. 3: 'Immersive Van Gogh' production (<https://www.vangoghexhibit.ca/>) in Toronto, Canada, September 2020. Photos by author.

Also, during the Covid-19 lockdown when all museums and galleries were shuttered, the 'Immersive van Gogh' exhibition in Toronto was marketed as drive-thru experience as a way to safely enjoy art and culture without risk of infection. I was curious to experience driving around in an art exhibition, but the fantasy I had about a kind of demolition derby of visitors racing around inside a museum was not realized, and instead rules, regulations and directives were imposed towards a scripted experience. I drove into a shipping and receiving dock, up a ramp and into a space large enough for 10 cars to park in side by side. Signs instructed drivers to tune into a specific radio station playing the exhibition soundtrack. Meanwhile a rolling snack bar and souvenir vendor made the rounds from car to car. When the projection began, I realized that I would have had a better view from an SUV than from my compact hatchback.

I was more fascinated with the interaction between spectator and exhibition than with the show, as I watched the woman in the SUV next to me watching the projection through her phone as she recorded it, offering an immediate multiplicity of moving images in layers of replication and projection, while she sipped on her snack bar drink. There was a moment when my rearview and side mirrors allowed views of the projection behind me, so my car assisted in my consumption of the

exhibition, while at the same time other parts of my car and the neighboring cars blocked my view of some projections. The intended immersive experience into van Gogh's painted world was interrupted by the shell of these cars, which protected us from Covid-19 but separated us from the projected environment through a physical barrier that removed us from being immersed in the intended way.

4. Speed, landscape and transformation

The moving landscapes through car windows and windshields have been compared to cinema screens, marking a perceptual shift in a person's integration with surrounding landscapes. Ford has taken this metaphor and made it manifest in a proposed car design, submitted for a patent in the US. Their design proposes a projection screen that would fold down in front of the windshield in its self-driving cars.⁶ Here the cinematic vision of landscapes moving by on car windows and windshields are overlaid with a literal cinema screen. How might this layered vision transform our way of seeing the world?

U.S. Patent Mar. 1, 2016 Sheet 2 of 6 US 9,272,708 B2

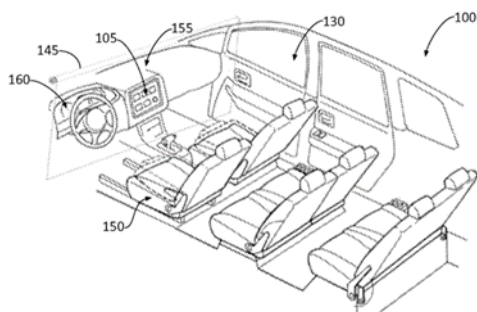


Figure 2A

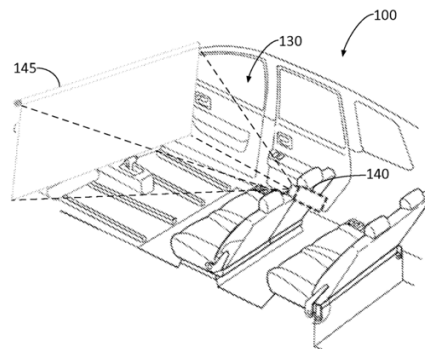


Figure 2B

Fig. 4: Autonomous vehicle entertainment system in Ford Global Technologies patent application US 9,272,708 B2, March 1st 2016.

The autonomy of self-driving cars (often ominously called 'autonomous vehicles') further the disintegration between body and environment. Whereas the action of driving a vehicle, similar to using a tool (perhaps in the Heideggerian sense of 'ready-to-hand') our embodiment extends into that tool and we may sense with and through that tool, as if the car were an extension of our bodies. That embodied lived experience of integration may parallel a closer aesthetic affinity with the car in terms of its appearance and socio-cultural symbolism. Perhaps this relationship between bodily extension and an expressive aesthetic individuation will transmute with future technological integrations into automobiles. Might the autonomous vehicle autonomously individuate?

Mobility and speed effect their own transformations through our integration with the car. Aside from the physical separation this hermit-crab-like construction provides us, the car allows for different forms of motion and result in different sense of freedom. Although quotidian routines lead us to follow repetitive routes, as car advertisements promise us we believe in our capacity to escape both our environment and the tedium of our daily lives through the mobility the car affords. Jean Baudrillard writes,

Movement alone is the basis of a sort of happiness, but the mechanical euphoria associated with speed is something else altogether, grounded for the imagination in the miracle of motion. Effortless mobility entails a kind of absence of responsibility. The effect of speed's integration of space-time is to reduce the world to two-dimensionality, to an image, stripping away its relief and its historicity and in a way ushering one into a state of sublime immobility and contemplation [...] Beyond a hundred kilometers per hour there is a presumption of eternity (as also, perhaps, of neurosis...)⁷

Through speed comes a transformation of state both in physical capacity for motion and in patterns of thought. Furthermore, the high speeds we achieve in cars increases our separation from the surrounding landscape. This two-dimensionality that Baudrillard describes and the flattened image of the world that results from it transform our relationship with landscapes we pass through. We are not disembodied, but we become another form of body, one that can no longer integrate itself into the landscape as before.

This separation of dimensional planes was present in earlier forms of high-speed travel. In discussing train travel, Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes of the transformation of our ways of perceiving the landscape as a result of this newfound speed and mobility. He writes,

the depth perception of pre-industrial consciousness was, literally, lost: velocity blurs all foreground objects, which means that there no longer is a foreground — exactly the range in which most of the experience of pre-industrial travel was located. The foreground enabled the traveler to relate to the landscape through which he was moving. He saw himself as part of the foreground, and that perception joined him to the landscape, included him in it, regardless of all further distant views that the landscape presented. Now velocity dissolved the foreground, and the traveler lost that aspect. He was removed from that 'total space' which combined proximity and distance⁸

The automobile has increased our velocities and further dissolved the foreground, and with it our integration into the surrounding landscape. Our mode of perception while travelling in cars

is either towards the distant horizon or the very close, such as our phones/tablets/screens. My childhood memories of sing-songs and observation games during long car trips are likely forever gone, as if I were a child today, I would certainly be watching my favorite TV shows on my phone.

5. A surface of symbolic extensions

There is an embodied dimension to our experience of the car as we extend our capacities for movement through it, and perhaps our senses by extension into it. This could be seen as a form of transformation into another body, one that has these increased capacities for velocity, and one that employs the materials of the car for sensing the surrounding environment. This sensorial extension continues into the social realm as the surface of the car comes to be a symbolic extension of the individual driving it. Paradoxical to the experience of the car as a place of shelter and a medium of social separation, the car is also a medium of social interaction as it operates symbolically to exhibit aesthetic values, group membership, and cultural identity. The shell can have an expressive capacity as it not only separates and conceals what hides within it, but also can display identity. This is often an idealised identity, one that is made public by expressed intention rather than spontaneous expression as persona is extended onto the exterior surface of the car. The selection and customization of the car's exterior components and materials aims to express a form of popular aesthetic discourse, as the car has come to be seen as an extension of the driver.

This notion of the car as both an embodied sensorial extension of the individual and as idealized expression of the individual's social persona is presented J. G. Ballard's novel *Crash* (1973), as well as David Cronenberg's film adaptation of the novel (1996), which explore a fictional group of car crash fetishists. The aesthetic sensorial (if not sensual) relationship with the car and with its way of engendering particular social interactions is taken to an extreme. In the novel, the role of the car as a mediator of social interactions is examined in the situation of a car crash. In that violent event, a merging of the living and non-living materials, bodies and cars, comes about through the transfer of energies, both kinetic and libidinal. Ballard describes a sexual dimension in this encounter between body and material surroundings. When bodies and the metal and plastic of the cars collide at high speed, the transfer of energies is manifested in the physical trauma of breaking living and non-living materials. For Ballard's characters, this results in a transformation of their sexual desires. He writes, "This obsession with the sexual possibilities of everything around me had been jerked loose from my mind by the crash."⁹

These characters also fetishize both the scars and physical transformations that the car crashes have left on their bodies as well as the interior materials, dials, and interactive mechanisms of the cars themselves. This extension of one into the other gives example of the car as

extension of the body towards a new form of being. Here the extension is more than symbolic as it includes marks of this interaction, marks of this violent event of integration. Other examples are more symbolic, such as the aesthetic modifications people make to their cars or trucks to further demonstrate their identities on the surface of their vehicles. These aesthetic decisions are complex and often particular to a place and culture, for example the jeepneys of the Philippines, the truck art of South Asia, the chiva buses of Colombia, the colectivos of Argentina, American hot rod culture, among others. In these instances of local car cultures, each idiosyncratic in its particular aesthetic language, the functional qualities of the car are overlaid with a surface that is symbolic as much as decorative. Such popular cultural expression envelops the quotidian utility of the automobile with surplus meaning.

The relationship between person and car exists in the everyday comings and goings of our lives, and for the most part the experience of this relationship is banal. The significance of this relationship can be made apparent by such aesthetic expressions as the aforementioned car modifications or speculative fictions like Ballard's *Crash*. This aesthetic enveloping of the utilitarian object as well as the somaesthetic embodied extension into it suggests there may be something in this relationship and its particularities that can reveal aspects of popular cultural expression and the ways we extend ourselves, bodily and otherwise, into what surrounds us.

¹ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the reordering of French culture*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1995, p. 55.

² Gary Numan, "Cars," side two track 4 on *The Pleasure Principle*, Beggar's Banquet, 1979, record.

³ Gary Numan: <https://www.ozy.com/good-shit/getting-back-behind-the-wheel/3906/> (accessed Oct 18th 2020, original unavailable?)

⁴ Matthew B. Crawford, *Why We Drive: Toward a Philosophy of the Open Road*, New York: Harper Collins, 2020, p.10.

⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, p. 5. Trans. Maria Jolas.

⁶ <http://patft.uspto.gov/netacgi/nph-Parser?Sect1=PTO2&Sect2=HITOFF&p=1&u=%2Fnethtml%2FPTO%2Fsearchbool.html&r=1&f=G&l=50&co1=AND&d=PTXT&s1=9272708.PN.&OS=PN/9272708&RS=PN/927270> (see 'images' page 4) (accessed 27.2.2020)

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict. London and New York: Verso, 1996, p. 65.

⁸ Wolfgang Schivelbusch. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2014, p. 63.

⁹ J. G. Ballard, *Crash*. New York: Picador, 1973, p. 29.

COLOUR POPS, NEW CAR SMELLS: THE FEMINIZATION OF SARAN BEFORE SARAN WRAP

Angela Cope

Abstract

This article examines the early history of the aesthetics of the car and how our relationship to the car has been influenced by designs that were made possible by the advent of plastics. It proposes that the plastics first used in car interiors shaped our relationship to cars, through their off-gassing that we experience as the ‘new car smell’ to masculine and feminine aesthetics in car design that are employed to sell them to consumers. The introduction of plastics, and in particular Saran (PVDC), allowed for a replication of a traditional domestic aesthetic. This led to a feminization of the car interior designed to sell cars to women, and shaped our contemporary experience of cars.

Keywords

Plastics, Gender, Replication, Consumerism, Domestic Aesthetics.

I came home from the hospital in a 1969 Volkswagen Fastback named Orville, that had been sold to my young parents for \$100 a couple of years prior by a family friend. Already nine years old, and having survived as many Montreal winters, its utilitarian maroon paint must have stood out against the November snowstorm that they drove to the hospital in, my mother in labour, the week prior. There wouldn't have been such a thing as an infant car seat in 1978, my mother would have held me in her arms in the front seat as they drove the hour-long drive home to our place in Hudson, Que.

I only have the vaguest memories of Orville. By the early eighties it was a rusting hulk, dripping oil onto cardboard on the driveway. What I do remember, though, is the smell of the interior. The bottom had rusted away, so there was a strong smell of motor oil inside. Mixed with that, there was an acrid smell of the vinyl seats disintegrating, their unstable early plasticizers nearly fully leached out after 15+ years of the extremes of Canadian weather speeding along the process. As distinctive as “new car smell,” there is also a very specific “old car smell” that is just as evocative as its counterpart. I remember crawling into the car, four or five years old, slightly in awe of this old hunk of steel with a human name. Its cracked vinyl seats broke open and exposed the polyurethane foam inside them; the steering wheel and gearshift knob were a hard plastic made shiny by hand oils, the windows yellowed due to the polyvinyl butyral interlayer of the safety glass. A mix of volatile organic compounds, the petrochemicals that made up a decaying modernity as we shifted into the postmodern 1980s.



The advertisement features a photograph of two women in a dark-colored convertible car. The woman in the foreground is wearing a bright yellow suit and a matching hat, leaning over the red plastic seat cover. The woman behind her is wearing a brown suit and hat. The car's interior is upholstered in a vibrant red plastic material. The word "SARAN" is printed in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the top of the image.

LOOK! *Seat Covers* OF LUSTROUS *Plastic* FOR YOUR CAR!

THE NEWEST STYLE note in motor cars is seat covers of smooth, lustrous plastic—custom made and woven from the remarkable Dow plastic, SARAN. This innovation in car slip covers offers light, attractive pastel shades—or, perhaps, transparency to actually reveal the tints of the upholstery—in every way lending new smartness and distinction to the car's interior.

Now, for the first time, seat covers in light colors are practical because SARAN is quickly and easily cleaned with just a damp cloth. There is no danger of the colors running. You can ride on these seat covers in wet bathing suits, if you like. If windows are left open, have no fear of damage from summer showers. For, SARAN is waterproof plastic.

There is plenty of ventilation with SARAN seat covers—they're cool! The smooth surface permits you to slide easily into modern low cars without difficulty or the slightest danger of catching clothes or hose. The value in these new seat covers is exceptional because SARAN will out-wear the life of the car.

While, currently, seat covers of SARAN are custom made only, they are significant of a marked trend.

They provide a striking example of the constant efforts of manufacturers to adapt plastics to numerous new products.

WORKING WITH YOU FOR AMERICA

DOW

CHEMICALS INDISPENSABLE TO INDUSTRY

THE DOW CHEMICAL COMPANY, MIDLAND, MICHIGAN
New York City—St. Louis—Chicago—San Francisco—Los Angeles—Seattle—Houston

1941

Figure 1: Saran seat covers advertisement. Originally appeared in Fortune, 1941. From Dow Chemical Company. "Saran," 1941. Advertisements from the Dow Chemical Historical Collection, Box 2. Science History Institute. Philadelphia.

The history of polyvinylidene chloride (tradenname: Saran) shows where this plasticized modernity began, in depression era America. Saran's adaptation into brightly coloured protective seat covers makes apparent a feminization of plastics and, by extension, a domestication of the automobile interior. It also tells the story of how automobiles are advertised and consumed, and how the aesthetics of plastics play a large role in gendering the automobile interior as female in contrast to the masculinized exterior. Plastics offered the ability to replicate other materials, and the *ersatz* traditional aesthetic applied to the automobile in turn emphasized plastic's fakeness – the simulacrum – resulting in the reification of the 'real.' Our conceptions of and relationships with cars, plastic, and the domestic, were likely influenced by the confluence of Saran, the automobile, and an attempt to relive an aesthetic of the past.

In April 1936, *Modern Plastics* ran an article about the Ford Motor Co. using soybean plastics in their vehicles. At that point only “garnish trim”¹ was being made out of soybean plastic, which encompassed only ten to fifteen pounds of the total weight of the car, but by 1940, a fully plastic prototype was available for the media to witness. A “brittle looking septuagenarian [Ford] picked up an ax[e] and swung it with all his might”² into the side panel of the prototype for photographers to record and report on the event, astoundingly showing the axe bouncing back without harm to the vehicle. The plastic futurism that was common during the interwar years, and finding its most overt expression in the many World Fairs of the time, was evident in how it was reported, as the “fenders of this Buck Rogers material... withdr[e]w from minor collisions... like unhurried rubber balls.”³ At around the same time, and not to be outdone by Ford Motor Co, the Pontiac “Ghost Car” was revealed at the 1939 New York World's Fair by General Motors. The clear plastic car was a part of a display about the future mobility of America, titled “Highways and Horizons,” designed by Norman Bel Geddes. The car was made from Plexiglas from Rohm and Haas and was one of the most popular exhibits at the Fair.⁴

The Ghost Car had the strange and prescient effect of both making plastic prominent and erasing it entirely. A Plexiglas shell for an automobile allows the viewer to see what plastic usually precludes: its inner, working parts, the intelligibility of a disappearing mechanical age. As Meikle writes,

until the advent of plastic, most objects, even complex ones, appeared as rationally intelligible assemblages of various parts and materials; they did not seem smoothly, inviolably whole. But plastic contributed to a syndrome of ignorance about technological processes by enclosing them in irreducible molded forms whose deceptive simplicity found its clearest expression in the streamlining of the 1930s.⁵

The Ghost Car, appearing at the end of the decade that embraced streamlined and art deco designs, foretold a postwar future where plastic would become what Gay Hawkins calls the “Skin of Commerce” – transparent and shiny, emphasizing the “real” goods inside.

While the entry of the US into the second world war interrupted the production of a mass-produced plastic car, the imaginaries of the possibility survived well into the 1950s. The original body of the Corvette was a Fiberglas shell, designed in much the same way as the prototype-cum-Disney attraction, the Monsanto House of the Future: a “monocoque” or “single egg” design paradigm (figure 3, left). Even though the Corvette is an iconic design, it was never widely produced, owing mostly to the low-tech and artisanal nature of fiberglass lay-up (figure 3, right). General Motors started producing them at three per day, and peaked at thirty-three per day, in comparison to the roughly 7500 cars per day produced with steel during the same time period. Although fiberglass was a common material for institutionalized mid-century modernism, most famously in the Eames molded shell chairs ubiquitous in schools and bus stations, its form never achieved domesticity in the frankly modernist way the plastics industry had hoped for postwar.

Instead, an *ersatz* traditionalism became dominant. The materials of the future were relegated to what Jeffrey Meikle calls a “damp cloth utopianism” where everything could be easily cleaned with the wipe of a damp cloth. As I will show, the dominance of an *ersatz* traditionalism was partly because thermoplastics like polystyrene, polyethylene, and the one I focus on here, polyvinylidene chloride, became the most ubiquitous plastics postwar, replacing the interwar hard thermoset plastics such as Bakelite and urea formaldehyde. Concurrently with the shift away from the hard thermoset plastics to the softer thermoplastics, what was *made* of plastic shifted from objects that could be considered more masculine to those that could be considered more feminine. Radios, desk lamps, telephones and fountain pens made of Bakelite are four prominent examples of iconic interwar plastics, meaning that the office desk of the average white-collar worker (i.e., male) would have been one of the surest places to find plastics in the interwar years. In contrast, some of the most iconic objects made of plastics of the postwar years are Tupperware, hula hoops, kitchenware and beanbag chairs, which are all distinctly feminized, infantilized and highly domesticated. That shift – from masculine to feminine products – dictated a concomitant devaluation of the material, which allowed for its eventual easy disposal.

This feminization and domestication came about through the introduction of an *ersatz* traditional aesthetic in the production of plastic products in order to reach out to women as consumers. This aesthetic changed from a forward-looking technologically utopian mentality to



Figure 2: The Pontiac "Ghost Car" exhibited at New York's 1939 World Fair. From Motor Cities National Heritage Area "Stories of the Week" Section, published August 27, 2017. "1940... Ghost Pontiac!" by x-ray delta one is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
Figure 3: The Monsanto House of the Future (left) and Corvette body (right). "Monsanto House of the Future - June 12, 1957–December 1967" by MidCentArc is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, "National Auto Museum, Reno - John Wayne's 1953 Chevrolet Corvette" by The Brucer is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

a conservative return to a familiar past. The change was primarily driven by a post-war response to the lived traumas so many experienced. What resulted from this regression was the proliferation of plastics into the domestic sphere, which both accustomed us to the ubiquity of the material in childhood and transformed how plastics are conceptualized, as a confluence of cleanliness, functionality, and disposability. Furthermore, the plastic quality of these new plastics, their chameleonic capacity to make manifest seemingly infinite forms, textures, and colours, led to the creation of ‘the fake’ not through a false authorship, but instead through a false material. Replicas could be created in the appearance of the original through using plastics. This is exemplified in the application of Saran as car seats. This application of novel chemistry allowed plastics to achieve domesticity and ubiquity, considerably increasing consumption of plastics, through an *ersatz* aesthetic of traditionalism, a reflection of the past rather than a look towards the future. What resulted from this is a shared experience of the aesthetic of plastic through our interaction with car interiors.

Our aesthetic experience of the car has come about as a result of this feminization and domestication of the car interior, which paralleled both the invasion of our homes with plastic disposables and the planned obsolescence of consumer goods in general, to create more (and faster) conspicuous consumption. The machine aged and futurist beauty of the 1920s and 1930s were still found in a few forms, for example fins on cars were a mundane postwar expression of a former utopian futurism. But the bubble top, flying saucer cars envisioned in the 1940s never came to fruition. Plastic instead found its place in areas like vinyl seating that imitated leather, giving rise to the near universal cultural referent of the “new car smell” that its off-gassing creates, as well as its converse – the cracked vinyl failure of plasticizers leached into the environment. Nowhere did that *ersatz* traditionalism find fuller expression than in Saran car seats, and the history of its development and integration as a material into our everyday surroundings begins to reveal the complexity of our relationship to plastics and how culture and gender have shaped our contemporary conceptions about it.

Before Saran wrap became a genericized trademark for wrapping leftover food products, it lived an entirely different life as an “easy care” fabric in 1940s and 1950s automobiles. Saran is better known to chemists as a copolymer of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and polyvinylidene chloride (PVDC) and came about as a result of manufacturers’ attempts to create an easier plastic to work with than straight PVC. PVC was one of the first fully synthetic thermoplastics to be perfected, by Waldo Semon at BF Goodrich in 1926. But PVC is a finicky plastic to create, as the melting point and the vaporization point are extremely close to each other.⁶ Mulder and Knot posit that if PVC was not one of the first plastics to be synthesized, it would never have been

scaled the way that it was, as it was so difficult to manufacture.⁷ The research into copolymers was therefore to overcome the problems with respect to its manufacture, and not because it was desirable to have different formulations; copolymerization made the plastic more able to be worked, rather than understood.

Of the many investigations into copolymers, there were two that became commercially successful: Vinylite and Saran. Vinylite was a copolymer of polyvinyl acetate (PVA) and PVC and found its original home in replacing shellac in records, which still have the eponymous moniker. Saran was developed more slowly and was only introduced on the eve of the Second World War in Europe. Saran was subject to the massive World War Two scaling of plastics that many in the industry experienced; the new materials proved lightweight, unbreakable, and – importantly in a world that was quickly becoming fully electrified – having dielectric insulating properties. Saran film during World War Two played a role strikingly similar to the Ghost Car of a few years prior: that of a clear skin, protecting the mechanically intelligible (and far more important) ordnance underneath. It would preface its existence as a wrap for food products, in that it was largely used to “keep moisture in its place” when shipping ordnance overseas.⁸

After World War Two, the plastics industry was eager to move into a greatly expanding consumer market. Meikle points out that the thermoplastics that were invented in the interwar period were not so much plastics invented with a specific purpose in mind, but instead with an enduring curiosity that begot “materials for which markets were later invented.”⁹ Plastics may well have remained a far smaller portion of the materials market if it were not for the fact that Germany, without a colonial base to draw from, understood far earlier the importance of a robust chemical industry to be able to create replacement materials cut off from embargoes or other wartime sanctions.¹⁰ While the US had spent the time from the end of the first world war to the beginning of the second creating and greatly enhancing their chemical industry, the Germans still had an edge when it came to synthetics – whether they were moulding materials, pharmaceuticals, or weaponry.¹¹ While most people know about the enormous amount of government money that allowed the Manhattan Project (to build the nuclear bomb) to go forward, the lesser known (but second biggest in terms of government expenditure) project was the “Rubber Reserve” project.¹² As the US was nearly entirely dependent on rubber plantations that became inaccessible after British Malaya fell to the Japanese in 1942, Government Rubber-Styrene (or GR-S) took on enormous strategic importance. From an annual output of just 231 tons in 1941, an unprecedented cooperation between government, academia, and industry allowed a massive scaling project to take place, and in four short years, the US was creating 70 000 tons per month of GR-S.¹³

The strategic importance of rubber to create tires for vehicles meant that many of the things that used rubber as a textile, particularly for waterproofing, were left looking for substitutes. PVC and Saran were the materials that they found for these purposes. Notably, Saran was used to modify combat boot insoles to be breathable. They were therefore able to dry in the constantly damp jungle climate of the Pacific Theatre, and did not rot the way that leather or canvas did.¹⁴ PVC and Saran were also used to create the first air inflatable rafts and other protective rain equipment, as well as solar stills to be able to collect fresh water when stranded on a lifeboat at sea.¹⁵ All of these wartime uses translated easily into postwar consumer products – the solar still became a child’s beach ball, the inflatable life raft became a fun day at the beach, and so on.

Dow Chemical company had different aspirations for Saran, however. Seeing the explosive wartime and postwar successes of DuPont’s new invention, Nylon,¹⁶ Dow was very interested in creating a similar market with Saran (figure 4). The copy in the advertisement for Saran reads “the first great change came in our own day with the development of plastics... rayon, Celanese, nylon. Dow... contributes Saran.” With a traditional Chinese block print that depicted heavily orientalist motifs of women weaving the plastic threads, the intention was undoubtedly to meld the traditional with the new, attempting to draw comparisons between traditional methods and looks of the old with the magical materials of modern synthesis. Although Dow’s aspirations were clear, what they would actually do with Saran did not come to fruition until it was clinched as a fabric for the New York Subway seats (figure 5).

Modern Plastics magazine, writing in 1944, points toward its “high tensile strength, abrasion resistance, and non-absorptive qualities... very much in demand for... [r]ailroads, buses, theatres, hospitals and public buildings... [due to] its sanitary qualities.”¹⁷ Saran yarns also have “many postwar possibilities in decorative fabrics, partly because... of improvements they facilitate in weaves and colo[u]rs... dye is incorporated into the resin solution and is therefore permanent.... This quality makes possible the weaving of pastel upholstery fabrics, which hitherto were too delicate for cleaning.”¹⁸ The fact that plastic fabrics allowed for pastels to be used in upholstery applications for the first time anticipated a feminization of synthetic textiles, and the postwar obsession with pastel pinks and greens materialized due to its marketing as a “trouble-free” fabric, for a “carefree life.”¹⁹ The Rockwellian depictions of smiling women in cars (Figure 1) gave the impression that Saran would be perfect for the modern housewife, releasing them through technological miracles – much like the washing machine and the dishwasher – from the menial labour that a pre-plastic world dictated, allowing them to take advantage of the freedom of the open road.



Figure 4: Saran, as a textile, advertisement. Dow Chemical Company. "A New Chapter in the Story of Textiles," 1946. Advertisements from the Dow Chemical Historical Collection, Box 4. Science History Institute. Philadelphia. <https://digital.sciencehistory.org/works/cghob88>. Figure 5: A postwar New York City subway car, featuring woven Saran seats. "New York Transit Museum" by kevin.hackert is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0

At the same time as those colours became possible, marketing to the suburban housewife became ubiquitous. While automobiles themselves were still very much masculinized and associated with steel, the automobile “accessories” were plastic and meant to appeal to women, in a clear postwar feminization and infantilization of plastics. In cheerfully coloured pastels or tartan prints evoking kilts and perhaps uniforms, the seat covers were meant to protect and keep fresh the “real” upholstery underneath them. They were distinctly marketed to women as an easy-care alternative, no matter how messy the children might be. Saran’s protective function morphs here from a masculinized packaging for ordnance – clear so that the important mechanical object could be seen underneath it – to a frivolous and feminized covering for the masculinized automobile. Over and over again the pictures to advertise Saran show smiling women in gloves and hats, seemingly happy with the plastic skin so conveniently provided for them. Even though the material is meant to improve durability, the material itself is not meant to be durable – it is meant to change with fashion and the proclivities of the feminine. To this day, many marketing campaigns to sell cars to women follow the “shrink it and pink it” advertising paradigm, instead of focusing on the safety and ease of use concerns that consistently poll top of mind when female car shoppers are asked for their priorities.

In contrast to the interwar years, where Bakelite and its thermoset cousins enjoyed an extraordinary reputation as a utopian and democratizing material, postwar Americans wanted to return to a more traditional aesthetic. Rather than expressing the frank modernism that many machine-age and Art Deco designs had first utilized plastic to do, the return to a traditional aesthetic meant that plastics had to be relegated back into being *ersatz* materials. Instead of the streamlined shapes and rounded corners of the 1930s, the decade of the rise of industrial design gave way to the very modern horrors of the Second World War, and some scholars attribute the regressive attitudes of the 1940s and 1950s to the collective recoiling from the effects of the atomic bomb.²⁰ But because plastics, especially thermoplastics like PVC and Saran, had been so dramatically scaled during World War Two, there was now a glut of the materials without a war machine to absorb it. In the years immediately postwar, plastic was often the only material available for consumer applications, as metals took far longer to come off of restriction postwar than plastics did; and then returned to restriction during the Korean War from 1951-1953.

The plastic-as-plastic aesthetic that existed throughout the 1930s, while surviving in places like Italy with designers like Ettore Sottsass and his iconic Olivetti typewriter (Sottsass begat the Memphis group in the 1980s) and Giulio Natta’s invention of polypropylene, did not continue its design aesthetic in mid-century North America.²¹ Instead, plastic became once again the great imitator: fake glass, fake leather, fake wood, and fake ceramic were all products of the petrochemical industry. They all found their expression in cars, in one way or another:

safety glass is two panes of glass sandwiched on a thin layer of polyvinyl butyrate, fake wood dashboards have long been made of laminates, imitation leather seating feels unmistakably sticky on a hot summer day. The sharp scents of PVC and Saran are those that make up the majority of the “new car smell” considered desirable enough to be mimicked on paper pine tree air fresheners. Those scents, though evocative, have been attributed to a variety of ill effects, up to and including carcinogenic. Rather than being allowed to be beautiful in its own right, plastics like Saran were only allowed to be a domesticated good: the alchemical utopian potential of the 1930s being replaced by a rather more mundane damp-cloth cleaning utopia of the 1940s and 1950s. The movement from alchemical to domestic utopian potentials was part of a larger trend that feminized and infantilized plastics on their way to their devaluation as a material that was ultimately disposable, and best ending up in the trash can.

What the reader therefore sees in the advertisements above represents the interstitial space between durability and disposability, a transition that passes conspicuously through domestication. Barthes, writing in 1957, posits that plastic is the “very idea of its infinite transformation... it is ubiquity made visible.”²² But to have the literal miracle of the transmutation of matter, plastic pays a price: no longer bourgeois, as other imitation materials had previously been, plastic “has climbed down, it is a household material. It is the first magical substance which consents to be prosaic.”²³ The devaluation of plastic continued as the baby boomers grew up, the material came to represent everything that was wrong with mainstream society. To drop out of that “plastic existence” was to embrace a back-to-land aesthetic – greens and browns, natural fibres like cotton or wool, long hair and beards never touched by plastic disposable razors. As the baby boomers hit adulthood, they rejected the plastic domestication of their parents and childhood, rebelling against the materials of modernity.

Plastics were so dramatically demonized during the 1970s, and the word changed so thoroughly to mean phony or fake, that many in academia and the materials industry working to perfect new and better types of plastic rebranded themselves in the 1980s. Hard plastics became “composite” materials, or resins, or polymer matrices, or glass reinforced polymers (more commonly known as GRP); plastic textiles became microfibres, or spandex, or “high-tech wicking” fabrics, or the green-washed bamboo rayon;²⁴ plastic woods became “engineered,” plywood, fibreboard, or chipboard. Those materials find purchase with a large population of people who do not realize that “carbon fibre composite,” for example, is plastic. Today, plastics make up fifty percent of the volume of a vehicle, while only encompassing ten percent of its weight, and carbon fibre composite is popular amongst gearheads everywhere, as it further lightens the vehicle and allows it to go faster (as well as looking distinctively part of custom car culture).²⁵ While plastics recognized as plastics are today coded as literal trash, plastics rebranded can be high-value again

(as anyone who has ever looked at the prices of a carbon-fibre composite bicycle knows). The rebranded plastics have also become distinctively masculine again, with many of their applications finding purchase in highly specialized and gendered subcultures of custom cars, bicycles and athletics. While there may be a nascent awareness of the fact that the “wicking” material is, in fact, simply polyester, the rebranding is so complete and effective that there is zero association between that “performance” material and the cheap looking suits of the 1960s.

In conclusion, far from the original utopian potential of an “all-plastics” car, postwar thermoplastics became the materials we all love to hate today, and they did so through their domestication and devaluation. As complicated as North America’s relationship to the automobile is when viewed through the current lens of rampant consumerism and climate change, so too are plastics that are used in the automobile to create the environs of the car – a perfect capsule of domesticity to protect those inside from the realities of the outside world. That Saran became the skin of the automobile suggests that the protections go both ways. It is an ethic of gendered care applied to that interior: delicately coloured, clean smelling, shiny, and without depth, much as the stereotypical housewife of the 1950s was meant to be. But a perfect plastic materiality is a temporary one at best, as the literal cracks show up after the plasticizers have leached into the air and affected the endocrine systems of those inhaling and ingesting them. The interior of the car becomes a corporate externality as knowledge around phthalates and reproductive problems become ubiquitous, and as a result Saran (PVDC) is no longer used in automobiles (or, even, Saran Wrap) anymore. The miasmatic new car smell, once coveted, has now become something to avoid.

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⁸ Dow Chemical Company, *Saran Film Keeps Moisture in Its Place*, 1943, Advertisement, 1943, Box 4. Science History Institute. Philadelphia., Advertisements from the Dow Chemical Historical Collection.

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¹⁵ “Solar Stills Lead to Inflatables,” *Modern Plastics*, June 1950.

¹⁶ Pap A Ndiaye, *Nylons and Bombs: DuPont and the March of Modern America*, trans. Elborg Forster, Studies in Industry and Society (Baltimore: JHUP, 2007).

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²² Roland Barthes, "Plastic," in *Mythologies: Roland Barthes*, trans. Annette Lavers, The Complete Edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 97–99.

²³ Barthes.

²⁴ "FTC Charges Companies with 'Bamboo-Zling' Consumers with False Product Claims," Federal Trade Commission, August 11, 2009, <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2009/08/ftc-charges-companies-bamboo-zling-consumers-false-product-claims>.

²⁵ Gina-Marie Oliver, "Plastics in Automotives," American Chemistry Council: Plastics Division, Automotive Plastics, 2020, https://www.automotiveplastics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019-Jan-KS-Approv-Auto-Lobbying-Factiods_2-Pages_RK-ACC-Stats.pdf.

THE MOTOR VEHICLE: A MUSING ON THE AESTHETICS OF THE CANADIAN OIL SANDS

Megan Green

Abstract

This article isolates depictions of gender and class that function at cross purposes to environmental concerns, in a critique of the narrative turn associated with the Canadian oilsands. The author isolates a discursive tendency in Petroculture Studies to conflate aesthetics, ethics and class in depictions of a mining community in Northern Alberta, Canada. It lampoons the ubiquity of expository accounts of the 'smell' of the region, and references to banal objects associated with the motor vehicle and conspicuous consumption. Building on the author's past work, the article focuses on the driveway and the motor vehicle as objects of material culture whose meaning is reduced to the context in which they are found. Select academic and popular media is contrasted with artistic production by the author and Kristopher Karklin, two artists from the Fort McMurray area.

Keywords

Petrocultures, Art practice, Class, Gender, Environmentalism, Consumption.

Jacked up trucks with trailer hitch balls dangling, passing on the shoulder of a remote northern Canadian highway. A Ford F150 if one is young, a dually (dual rear wheel) of some big three make (GM, Ford, Chrysler) if one has ascended to the ostensible nouveau-riche; better to haul an ATV, skidoo or camping trailer. There may be a decal of the province of Newfoundland's flag in the rear window, perhaps even the flag of the Dominion of Newfoundland, if such an individual is feeling nostalgic. The driver wears his site ID badge to the bar as a status symbol. The pronoun is always he, as the women "round these parts" are either in service of the men and their 'job on site,' or employed in the service industry.

1. Introduction

In Canada, at least among people involved in the study of petrocultures, such a trite description is easily recognised as a specific regional setting. It is typical imagery associated with the northern Albertan oilsands; such narrative flourishes are ubiquitous among the myriad news articles, essays, documentaries, and works of fiction portraying the sociocultural character of the region. Such academic dispatches from research trips into the region are generally written at a somewhat smug arms-length distance. One wouldn't want to get any of that bituminous sand¹ on them; it needs to be refined before it could be at all palatable to the majority of our high-octane energy consuming society.

There lies a problem in how those who live and work in Fort McMurray are depicted. Such an imaginary can create a situation in which it is easier to overlook the quandary of our collective enormous energy consumption, in favour of satirising an easier target. Those who serve as metonymy for fossil fuel energy consumption because their sociocultural markers are aesthetically clearer. Geo Takach writes that

Recent work, drawing on scholars such as Cronon (1995) and Morton (2007), has explored the interplay between the Romantic gaze (sanctifying nature as sublime) and the extractive gaze (viewing nature as a resource to be exploited) in the work of Canadian landscape artists, to conclude that in separating people from nature, both gazes function similarly to subordinate the land to human purposes (Hodgins & Thompson, 2011). Such representations may be positioned in a wider trend in which media visualizations of nature are based on an implicit ideology, tending to perpetuate and justify existing power relations (e. g. Berger, 1972; Sturken & Cartwright, 2008). Those visualizations use images which are increasingly abstract or iconic, and which by repetition, “replace other possible representations, particularly those that locate and connect such issues in actual concrete processes such as globalism and consumerism” (Hansen & Machin, 2008, p. 775).²

Moral characterizations of the natural resource industry in general, and the people who work in it aside, utilising class condescension to criticize does not address the problematics of the broader economic and political systems, and cultural undercurrents that generated the Canadian oilsands.

Criticisms of the aesthetics of the built environment and material consumption choices of the people living in the area abound. A formative example for me being the tone of Rob Shields’ description of the town of Fort McMurray in his “Feral Suburbs: Cultural Topologies of Social Reproduction, Fort McMurray, Canada,” in the *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15 wherein he writes

Suburban life in Fort McMurray means to be melancholically governed most of the time by the isolation imposed by the expanse of wilderness, to be fatally forced to respect its climatic extremes, to grimly wrest oil wealth from the strata of the area, or to joyfully respond to its beauties.... It conforms to images and forms of the North American middle class rather than to those of the local, the working class or to the village rubric of the surrounding Métis, Cree and Dene settlements. Indeed, this is a paradise of the lumpen proletariat, wealthy on overtime and double shifts.³

Unfortunately, this tends to reinforce a capitalist narrative linking social value in this community specifically to the acquisition of the contextually ‘incorrect’ material goods, serving to reinforce the moral superiority of such critics, while instigating a kind of regional and class-based antagonism that is often counterproductively useful to politically conservative lobby groups.

As an object of material culture in the context of the oilsands mining region, the cultural associations related to motor vehicles place a person in a sociocultural context with a particular relationship to the landscape. I am interested in the kinds of encounters possible on the driveways of Fort McMurray.⁴

My interest in examining the driveway as a site of encounters⁵ arises from an interest in how, “because of the toxins’ invisibility and banality, individuals often attend to environmental problems not because they are the most dire, pressing, or dangerous, but because they are the most evocatively articulated.”⁶ The driveway is a banal and universal marker of fossil fuel consumption everywhere, and yet often images of Fort McMurray feature the driveway in a way that would suggest it is somehow symbolic of the region and its ‘character.’

2. Cliché in Depictions of the Oil Sands Mining Region

First, an article that ran in *The Walrus* in 2013: “Big Mac” featured an image of a pregnant young woman in her driveway power washing a truck on a lift kit with chrome flames emblazoning the sides (2013; fig.1). She and her neighbors are described in the article’s text as living

the good life, Fort Mac style. Parked in the Peckfords’ driveway are two trucks, a Suburban and a Sierra, plus a new trailer that sleeps ten. A For Sale sign is posted on the four-bedroom house next door, which is listed at \$1.5 million. In the playground down the street, kids jockey for position on slides and monkey bars, more evidence of a demographic boom that is seeing up to 150 new births a month in a town with just three obstetricians. The scene recalls North America’s postwar suburban idyll, supersized with hydrocarbons.⁷

The author of the article also describes how while visiting the town he “decide[d] to do what almost nobody here does: go for a walk in the woods.”⁸ It seems to be assumed here that an engagement with the environment and working in the oil industry are incompatible, or somehow entirely compartmentalized, as opposed to culturally rationalized in ways that must be understood and confronted. The familiar tropes and “discursive formations”⁹ of boomtown ruin better articulate capitalism and issues of class in general than they describe the ostensible culturally bereft quality perceived to exist in mining towns, ‘the good life’ in this context apparently being limited to the

ostentatious consumption of material property. The image, in the context of the article, also implies a kind of heteronormativity, the vehicle and power washer being somewhat symbolically phallic;¹⁰ the woman pictured being pregnant and dutifully washing what might be presumed to be her husband's truck also sends a message. The reality however may be entirely different, and we cannot know how the woman photographed here sees herself in the image, nor the photographer's intent: the image could be empowering to the subject in the context of this subculture, but of course this is not explored in the pages of *The Walrus*. Describing Fort McMurray as suburban is a common rhetorical tool in most analysis of Fort McMurray's built environment;¹¹ the cultural currency of the suburbs being somewhat derogatory in this context, conveying a sense of artificiality and problematic social values.



Fig 1. Image by Naomi Harris, from Taras Grescoe's "Big Mac: Fort McMurray has ambitions to become more than a one-resource town," *The Walrus Magazine* (Toronto: The Walrus Foundation, 2013). Copyright Naomi Harris, used with permission.

A depiction of the region in a more academic context appears in Warren Cariou's "Tar Hands: A Messy Manifesto." Cariou's hyperbolic description of the region acts as an alternative to a rational argument that the author feels no one, apparently, has accepted or will accept for changing Canada's climate change and energy policy,

What I remember most about the tar sands is the stink. We stood there with our cameras, trying to capture a record of that obliterated landscape, but I could hardly see. The fumes were like hammers: sulfur and benzene and something else – a dead smell, a charnel residue on the back of my tongue. I had a migraine in half a dozen breaths. I breathed into my shirtsleeve, trying not to retch. How could people work in this, day after day? How could the Cree, Metis and Dene people of Fort Mackay live in it? “Oh, I used to smell it, too” one security guard laughed, after warning us to stay off company property. “But after a week or two you don’t notice a thing.”¹²

As someone who has spent most of her life living in the region, I would say that it isn’t really an issue of not noticing oil anymore, the opposite in fact: oil drives the economy of the town and many people are intimately aware of its material qualities and uses as the reason they are employed and able to have the modern conveniences they do. Assuming, based on my experience, that the ‘smell’ in Cariou’s description is either an allegory or an exaggeration for the purpose of persuasion, as a cultural insider I have observed that an intimate awareness of where oil comes from and how much contemporary Canadian life relies on fossil fuel energy has rendered the whole process banal in this community. The banality of cars, plastics and other seemingly easily available energy has been linked to the process of mining in the minds of the people who participate in its extraction, it is linked conceptually to what it makes possible in the contemporary Canadian built environment.

Consider another narrative turn in an academic article by Patchett & Lozowy on the region,

On the day that we traveled Highway 63 it was mid-winter, making the already hazardous conditions seriously treacherous, a fact evidenced by the recurrent appearance of wrecked and abandoned vehicles along the hard shoulder of the highway. The four-and-a-half-hour drive north to ‘Fort Mac’ was the longest, most drawn-out white-knuckle ride of my life.

After such a journey, the sight of ‘Fort Mac’ does little to convince that it was worth the risks. Of course, for those working at the Oil Sands the economic rewards to be had there far outweigh the dangers of the drive and the numbing dullness of the town itself. To the tourist, Fort McMurray appears makeshift: a ramshackle grid of functional building blocks that define a boomtown: a place to sleep and eat. Yet the town itself never sleeps. As the urban service centre for the region, it serves the 24/7 production of the Oil Sands. The constant hum of traffic and the repetitive approach, stop, idle and depart at the chartered bus stops which run workers back and forth to the mines make Fort Mac a difficult place to get some sleep for the uninitiated.... The smoking chimneys of a Suncor refinery offered the first visual

indication of mining operations north of the bridge crossing the Athabasca River. As we drove towards them, the air in the car grew thick with the aroma of hydrocarbons.¹³

Somewhat condescendingly from the point of view of the local, the smell in both passages is described as overwhelming, the landscape as bleak, and the people as dull and somehow having become impervious to the smell and the lack of meaning beyond the acquisition of oil money in their lives. In general, this place is described a kind of far-off dangerous place one endures for the economic benefits, the town and industry seemingly as impermanent and ill-conceived as modernity itself; vehicles and the smell associated with them feature heavily in most depictions of the region. If one were to imagine this place as analogous to the experience of the car, it would be the smell of pumping gas, laying down asphalt, changing oil, burning tires and exhaust. The not so flashy side of modernity, the part you don't put in the car commercial.

Many others have written about the sublime projections on an imaginarily uninhabited 'wilderness' as a notion that allowed it to become ripe for colonial expansion,¹⁴ the Romantic/extractive-cum-consumptive gaze,¹⁵ as in the 'petro-poetics'¹⁶ of images of oil, and how this oil imag(e)inary¹⁷ tends to conceptualise oil as invisible, and also imply a vastness and an emptiness onto the landscape that obscures that these are real finite places that are not empty of people, meaning, or not integral to the way contemporary life is literally fueled. As Jennifer Peebles writes, "Using scale to make the toxic appear sublime comes with risk. It may predispose people to look for toxins in the extraordinary, as opposed to on the shelves of their garages."¹⁸ The sublime conceptualization also allows for fear and moral panic to be projected onto these 'marginal' contexts, locating oil in some other place, rather than where most people might confront it in their everyday lives,¹⁹ running through the cultural territories we inhabit. It might be helpful to broaden conceptualizations of oil, nature and gender.

3. Artistic work from within the Oilsands Subculture

The 2017 Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art, *For the Time Being*, featured the work of two artists associated with Fort McMurray. The work of Kristopher Karklin and my own both draw from personal histories spent in the region; our work contrasts with the usual approach to depicting this place as one where the anthropocene could be exemplified.

Peta Rake and Kristy Trinier describe in the *For the Time Being* exhibition catalogue that the biennial orients itself to the notion that the Alberta Biennial is an 'Alberta conversation.' Referring to the curator's onsite interviews with the artists, Rake describes how

the notion of the transitional spaces in-between every 'place' also makes me think of the bodies within them. Mostly about women's bodies and the spaces that were delineated or designated for them, and here I am specifically referring to the 'women's only' floors of the hotels we stayed in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray.... I also want to negate the way that regionalism is seen through rose-coloured glasses, because after the road trip we took and the conversations we had with artists across the province, it was evident that there are some extremely dark and violent parts of this place, like any.²⁰

The multiple natural disasters occurring around the province while the biennial was being produced, flooding in Calgary, Canmore, High River, Banff and others, and the massive Fort McMurray wildfire, produced in Trinier

an awareness of the fact that at any time, the world could end-or, more specifically, the world as you know it could end.... We can see that 'world' is over, and a new world will be conceived going forward. What was merging out of instability, or the ominous forces at work environmentally and politically to disrupt the unknown, was really palpable."²¹

Taking Trinier and Rake's writing as an introduction to the situation in this corner of the anthropocene, what do the poetics utilized in cultural production addressing the oil sands and industry towns say about cars vis a vis oil and gender in this context? How are notions produced by dominant cultural narratives projected onto spaces, and what do the assumptions in these notions reveal? The tension in conceptualizations of masculinity and mining associated with the oil sands region in Northern Alberta is explored in our distinct individual artistic practices and is molded by experiences had during formative years spent living and working in a northern space of oil extraction.

Karklin's works in his *New Series* feature nude male figures, some doing what one might consider to be male gendered activities, such as weightlifting, hitting a baseball, working around an oil pipeline, all explicitly in what is generally considered to be a gendered space. In *Backyard (night-time)* (2015; Fig 2) a naked man is pictured doing bicep curls at the edge of his open garage door by his backyard fire pit, it seems like a scene of pathetic masculinity, for readers familiar with 'Fort Mac's' cultural currency the figure also 'works at site.' Ondine Park writes that Karklin's images have an 'eerie' and 'suffocating' quality.²² It would not be hard to get to such a reading given the poetics associated with and the images that represent the oil sands; the 'toxic sublime'²³ that Peeples describes in the Edward Burtynsky images of oil sands mining being the most iconic.

However, Karklin's process in constructing his images gives context for a more nuanced reading. Karklin's images are based on his own experiences and memories illustrated in

meticulously constructed models that are photographed before a figure is digitally inserted; Karklin appears to be generally representing himself in spaces he has inhabited. Explanatory text on his website reads,

Karklin engages with the sensibility of reality and fiction [...] here events experienced are tangible and definite, our memories of those events are ephemeral, and intangible, causing many details to be lost or gained in the translation.... Karklin recreates a memory which, due to inconsistency and manipulation, alters the reflection of the experience and space being recreated.... An integral component of Karklin's work is his investigation into the relationship between the urban living space and its occupant; where the exchange that occurs is intimate and secure, it is also temporary and homogenous. This idea is manifested in his work where the spaces that he recreates are minimal to the point where there is almost nothing, except the occupant. Due to the sparseness of the environments, the viewer is drawn into the space, and interprets the piece in relation to their own past experiences."²⁴

When the built environment of Fort McMurray is pictured, there is generally a certain kind of meaning projected onto the image, and that meaning generally relates to some kind of ethical judgement. Park's interpretation of the images appears to be that the people and spaces depicted are a product of the shallowness, emptiness and the moral bankruptcy of the oil industry. As Karklin's text seems to posit, the viewer of these images interprets them based on their own understanding of the spaces depicted.

While many of Karklin's images are not all obviously interiors and exteriors specific to the oil sands region, this context is integral to readings of his work. Nature in Karklin's images is, as Park writes of *Backyard (Daytime)* (2014; Fig 3), "simulated as a lively world stretching beyond the bounds of human inhabitation but in fact acting as a cover that disguises the expansion of the desiccated, antisocial interior,"²⁵ that she implies the figure embodies, given that the sort of mining scenes from the Burtynsky images exist just out of frame. Park is imagining the psychological interiority of the figure and projecting it onto the forest; an interiority that seems to come from some notion about the real place and the meaning Park appears to be attributing to it. The sort of masculinity we are seeing here is interpreted in light of a sense of artificiality in the image. Karklin's images are created as a sort of interpretation of his experiences based on memory and emotional texture; therefore, I find this instance to be an interesting case study in what people at a distance from these actual physical spaces imagine when they interpret places that loom large in the Canadian imagination, as the space of the oil sands does. Among built environments, which

are perhaps generally projected upon as masculine, when placed in contrast to 'mother nature,' this particular built environment is generally seen as a hyper-masculine gendered space. One could see this as a kind of assumption about the sort of masculinities one might find here, and the sub-culture of this place particularly, as being as toxic as the spaces in the Burtynsky images.

The tendency to use gendered tropes in discourses about oil and the environment can accurately describe particular kinds of abuses, but this can be a slippery notion easily fitted to ideological aims. It lends itself some implicit claim that women are somehow more 'in tune' with nature, or more like nature, which could seem to come from a patriarchal notion about man as a steward of the earth, and the earth as like a woman to be plundered.²⁶ Although in *Exposed: Environmental politics and pleasures in Posthuman Times* Stacy Alaimo is writing about 'carbon-heavy masculinity' in modes of consumption in Texas post 9/11 as being somehow related to repressed dread of climate change, the language used is similar to descriptions of the oil sands mining region. She writes that

“a nationalistic stance of impenetrable masculinity [...] serves only to exacerbate the climate crisis [...] it is especially difficult to ignore the parodically hypermasculine modes of consumerism in which bigger and harder is better. “McMansions” mushroom as suburban and exurban sprawl devour formerly open spaces [...] Even more noticeable, perhaps, is the fact that SUVs and pickup trucks have not only grown ludicrously huge but are armed with aggressive impenetrability, covered, as they often are, with armor-like accouterments including big rugged grille guards and hubcaps arrayed with frighteningly metal cones that look like medieval weapons. Some of these vehicles sport large metal testicles that hang from the trailer hitch (the hitch itself becomes the penis in this ensemble). [...] Analyzing transport and overconsumption in terms of gender enables linkages to what Mann calls a ‘militarized masculine aesthetic,’”²⁷

a cultural mode of heteronormative masculinist nationalism that Alaimo and Mann link to racism in the United States, and the use of oil as a justification for the Iraq war via neo-colonialism. The automobile is generally considered as a masculine object, used to subdue the landscape by rapidly crossing it. Constructing the environment as feminine and vulnerable also implies that it is malleable, and *under control*, following that cultural logic this would imply that some kind of absolute technological control over the environment is possible, and that environmental harm could be undone.



Fig 2. Kristopher Karklin, *Backyard (Night-time)*, 2015. 36”x54” Inkjet Print, Edition of 7, ‘Copyright Kristopher Karklin, used with permission.’ Fig 3. Kristopher Karklin, *Backyard (Daytime)*, 2014. 36”x54” Inkjet Print, Edition of 7, ‘Copyright Kristopher Karklin, used with permission.’

It is useful to address the spaces of oil as ones of convergence, where globalism, cultural constructions, social relations and injustices play out in ways that are potentially illustrative of something upstream resulting from some cultural psychology. The conditions that made the oil sands possible, the drivers and enablers of the oil industry, exist in a variety of places, in the context of a global market for energy which perpetuates a colonial and capitalist ethos of engaging with natural resources in which we, the people who require energy at this scale, and local, provincial and national governments are in turns complicit in and implicitly bound up in to meet our physical needs and desires.

In my own work I attempt to express a melancholy related to my experience of these issues, having spent my formative years in northern Alberta. The work attempts to express the affect of the space utilising the uncanny, while attempting to facilitate an empathy with the regional subculture; thereby aiming to expose something of the psychology of interactions with the landscape had in the region and what it might say about mining, class and how the landscape is constructed culturally.

Objects and their associated narratives can begin to contextualize oil-sands mining in its specific geo-cultural landscape,²⁸ they can be used to illuminate issues related class and gender, and how they exist in material culture.²⁹ Animal remains represent a convenient way to get at the colonial nature of the Canadian relationship with the landscape; there is a through line running from the Canadian fur trade to our current predicament as a petrostate. I utilise my own anecdotal encounters with ‘remains,’ had in northern Alberta in the context of oil sands mining, as a way to unpack a narrative in the Canadian cultural imaginary that conveniently consigns mining to *some-where else* by placing it in the context of regional antagonisms between margin and center; as opposed to confronting the Anthropocene as an epoch brought on by the energy use of a growing global minority, in a progression that will eventually result in a post human world.

Wildfire Plastic 1 puts a piece of plastic melted in Fort McMurray during the 2016 Horse River wildfire on display; the experience of the fire itself related to an individually visceral experience of the threat of the post human. The sublime, in the form of a wildfire, is a leveling force pointing to the non-primacy of humanity in the landscape; the melted plastic is displayed as an object of value, emerged from a crucible and seized upon as evidence of some reckoning to be put on a pedestal. Ironically in contrast to this reading of the object, the melted plastic sits on a piece of bone, the pedestal is made of velvet and golden mirrored acrylic. Together, this arrangement of objects is menacing, its intent was to empathise with the perspective of local residents employed in mining, who had an extremely visceral encounter with their own potential

destruction; the wildfire, as an entanglement of relationalities³⁰ illustrating a disturbing relationship with the non-human.

On modernity and the souvenir, Celeste Olalquiaga writes that

Commodification is like the greedy King Midas, who wanted everything he touched to turn to gold, until he realized that everything really did mean all. He almost died of starvation [...] The souvenir is a remembrance kissed by poisoned lips, savoring the lethal touch even as it races to meet a tragic end.³¹

The melted plastic is a menacing souvenir from a kind of apocalypse wreaked upon the bus stops described by Patchett & Lozowy. I conceptually frame the melted plastic as souvenir object as a way to encapsulate the various affects following the event, a smug disaster porn 'I told you so' for some seeking to make easy connections, and a disturbing experience for others.

As someone for whom the apocalyptic images of oilsands mining were banal, as that is the landscape I grew up with, images of oilsands mining are no more disturbing than any other everyday activity enabled by oil and 'cheap' energy; the landscape of industry became the landscape itself.³² When I first saw the Edward Burtynsky images of the oil sands, my internal response was merely to try to find places that I had been at the sites pictured. The images recalled advertising by industry contract companies, magazines printed for employees and colouring books for their children, and some of my own childhood experiences of being brought to work with my mother. I can recall myself and my pack of future industry employee friends riding a shuttle bus past the sulfur pyramids on the Syncrude site in the late 1990's to watch the adults participate in fire safety competitions. These adults, men primarily, occasionally even 'rescued' my childhood friends made up as causalities with white painted faces in blue employee issue overalls. Industry plying us children with barbequed hotdogs and the chance to be casualties. For me, the images were relatively neutral, and somewhat lacking in the sublime fear, horror and moral panic some attribute to them.³³ If anything, beyond trying to place myself in the images from an aerial perspective, at the time I was vaguely annoyed by the pearl clutching from the settler culture community.

One approach that interests me as a way of undercutting tokenism and simplistic stereotyped narratives around oil that populate references to Fort McMurray, is Nicole Seymour's notion of 'bad environmentalism.' Seymour defines bad environmentalism as "environmental thought that employs dissident, often-denigrated affects and sensibilities to reflect critically on both our current moment and mainstream environmental art, activism, and discourse."³⁴



Fig 4. Megan Green, *2016 Horse River Fire: Melted Plastic 1*, 2018. Melted plastic from the 2016 Fort McMurray Wildfire, bone, mirrored acrylic, foot stool. Fig 5. Megan Green, *Home Décor*, 2014. Found cellphone photo, light box, electronics, found wood carving, antlers, imitation wood paneling. 21x13.5x11 inches

Among the subculture working in the industry, there is a sense that the environmental movement, when limited to a fashion or lifestyle choice, allows outsiders to ignore how

we live in an urban-industrial civilization but at the same time pretend to ourselves that our real home is in the wilderness...we give ourselves permission to evade responsibility for the lives we actually lead. We inhabit civilization while holding some part of ourselves...aloof from its entanglements... all the while pretending that these things are not an essential part of who we are.³⁵

How then, should we negotiate culpability for environmental destruction? How do individuals participating in mining see it? How might some feature of mainstream environmentalism be complicit in enabling “right-wing factions [to] consistently deploy naked class-based arguments against climate and environmental policies [...] based on the presumption that such policies will harm ordinary working people”³⁶ and what can be done to undermine this class warfare?

Home Décor features an image of a Fort McMurray resident holding two severed deer heads, the figure has emerged from a dark driveway and posed with his pickup truck in the background. Modes of natural resource consumption are entangled here; this image, and its simultaneous resource utilisations, signify machismo and membership in a particular subculture. Through my work I am interested in exposing a conceit by “questioning basic environmentalist assumptions: that reverence is required for ethical relations to the nonhuman.”³⁷

Every feature of the image in *Home Decor* relates to oil. It explores kitsch as a cultural form and positions markers of petroleum consumption as being like kitsch, with a cultural currency in line with the hunting trophy. Rachel Poliquin writes that

of the genres of taxidermy, hunting trophies are the souvenirs and the story tellers, which is to say, of the genres of taxidermy, hunting trophies are among the most deeply personal and so perhaps necessarily the rawest... Souvenirs are always deeply personal possessions enfolded in our sense of identity, desires, and authenticity.³⁸

In hunting done by this subgroup particularly, a pickup truck or ATV is often featured in trophy snapshots, the hunter is

simultaneously participat[ing] in a sportsmen’s culture: the importance of the hunt is not so much the meat but its symbolic resonance within a particular community... a social practice whose meaning is fundamentally shaped by its context.³⁹

The work exists in opposition to notions of the problem of oil as somehow invisible, from the point of view of the ‘sub-culture’ of mining communities this is a “geo-culturally uneven”⁴⁰ assumption. The man in *Home Décor* engages with nature as a hunter and as someone employed in oilsands mining. The meaning attributed to both activities is culturally specific; it is obvious to all that oil sands mining is energy inefficient when compared to other oil sources and environmentally harmful; to assume that people from this community do not know that is condescending, as “any given emission is not owned by an individual, but is rather a product of a web of social relations that make the moment of combustion possible.”⁴¹ While my work is broadly ‘environmentalist,’ while “eschewing affects and sensibilities”⁴² of the sort attributed to a kind of sentimentalist conceit in mainstream environmentalism, the perspective taken in my work is one that hopes to “utilise irony to disrupt the binarized logic of despair/hope and to dispute mainstream environmentalism’s claims to authenticity and straightforwardness.”⁴³

In my objects and in Karklin’s images, ‘oil’ exists in cultural context and in object relations. In my view this conveys an understanding of oil among people close to it: the built environments it produces, the social reproduction it lends itself to, and the abuses of its acquisition and distribution are not related to some morally abhorrent quality radiating from the substance itself to afflict mining communities, but as a function of how its use reflects a broader cultural undertow that flows from something else. Celeste Olalquiaga in *The Artificial Kingdom* writes that “kitsch is [the] scattered fragments of the aura, traces of dream images turned loose from their matrix, multiplied by the incessant beat of industrialization, covering the emptiness left by both the aura’s demise and modernity’s failure to deliver its promise of a radiant future.”⁴⁴ From the Ford F-150 ads that paint the vehicles prospective owners as ruggedly masculine – if not cowboys specifically, to the sportscar cum prosthetic penis, back to the futurist aesthetics of 1960’s cars and the DMC Delorean, the motor vehicle is an object whose aesthetics reflect the values and aspirations of the sociocultural groups who consume it; oil is a material that reflects our longings, in a way that is analogous to how kitsch objects point to a failure of modernity to produce a utopia.

¹ Geo Takach, “Selling Nature In a Resource-based Economy: Romantic/Extractive Gazes and Alberta’s Bituminous Sands,” *Environmental Communications* Vol. 7, No. 2, (2013): 211-230.

² Takach, 212.

³ Rob Shields, “Feral Suburbs: Cultural Topologies of Social Reproduction, Fort McMurray, Canada,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15, no. 3 (2012): 1–11.

⁴ Megan Green, “Anecdotal Encounters on Driveways: The Aesthetics of Oil in Northern Alberta and Newfoundland,” *Energy Culture: Art and Theory on Oil and Beyond*, edited by Imre Szeman and Jeff Diamanti (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2019), 160-174.

- ⁵ Amitav Ghosh, "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel," *New Republic* 2 (1992): 29–34. Graeme Macdonald, "Oil and World Literature." *American Book Review* 33, no. 3 (2012): 7-31. Casey Williams, "Energy Humanities," forthcoming in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Critical and Cultural Theory*, 5.
- ⁶ Jennifer Peeples, "Toxic Sublime: Imaging Contaminated Landscapes," *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture* 5, no. 4 (2011): 374.
- ⁷ Taras Grescoe, "Big Mac: Fort McMurray has ambitions to become more than a one-resource town," *The Walrus Magazine* (Toronto: The Walrus Foundation, 2013).
- ⁸ Grescoe, *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Sherrill E. Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002) 155.
- ¹⁰ The reading of the power washer in the above image as specifically phallic was a salient insight had by a peer reviewer on an earlier draft, and so was incorporated here and contextualised within the article.
- ¹¹ Rob Shields. "Feral Suburbs: Cultural Topologies of Social Reproduction, Fort McMurray, Canada." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (2012): 1-11. Sage Publications, online.
- ¹² Warren Cariou, "Tarhands: a Messy Manifesto," *Imaginations: Sighting Oil* Issue 3-2, 2012, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* (Edmonton: University of Alberta) 20.
- ¹³ Patchett & Lozowy, "Reframing the Canadian Oil Sands," *Imaginations: Sighting Oil* Issue 3-2, 2012, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* (Edmonton: University of Alberta) 149-150.
- ¹⁴ Alan Bewell, "Romanticism and Colonial Natural History," *Stud Romanticism* 43 No. 1 Spring, (2004):5-6
- ¹⁵ Takach, 225.
- ¹⁶ Graeme Macdonald, "Till a' Seas Gang Dry? Petro-Littorals and Maturing Fields North to South," conference presentation, "Petrocultures 2016: The Offshore," Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, 1 September 2016.
- ¹⁷ Imre Szeman and Maria Whiteman, "Oil Imag(e)inaries: Critical Realism and the Oil Sands," *Imaginations: Journal of Cross Cultural Image Studies* 3, no. 2 (2012):46-67.
- ¹⁸ Peeples, 383.
- ¹⁹ Szeman and Whiteman, *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ Peta Rake and Kristy Trinier, curatorial statement for *for the time being: 2017 Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art*, exhibition catalog (Edmonton: Art Gallery of Alberta and Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, 2017).
- ²¹ Rake and Trinier, *Ibid.*
- ²² Oline Park, "Private Suburban Home: The Phantasmagoric Interior and the Ghostly Individual," *Sociology of Home: Belonging, Community, and Place in the Canadian Context*, Gillian Anderson, Joseph G. Moore and Laura Suski Ed. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2016): 78.
- ²³ Jennifer Peeples, "Toxic Sublime: Imaging Contaminated Landscapes," *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture* 5, no. 4 (2011).
- ²⁴ <https://www.kristopherkarklin.com/about>, accessed July, 2020.
- ²⁵ Park, 79.
- ²⁶ Grace.
- ²⁷ Stacy Alaimo, "Climate Systems, Carbon-Heavy Masculinity, and Feminist Exposure," *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
- ²⁸ Graeme Macdonald, "Research Note: The Resources of Fiction," *Reviews in Cultural Theory* 4, no.2 (2013):7. In reference to Macdonald's description of an awareness of oil that is "geo-culturally uneven," as opposed to how it is generally described as tacitly invisible by the oil humanities in general.
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THE CHANGING SOCIAL ECONOMY OF ART: ARE THE ARTS BECOMING LESS EXCLUSIVE?

REVIEW

Dušan Milenković

Hans Abbing (2019): *The Changing Social Economy of Art: Are the Arts Becoming Less Exclusive?* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 257 pages.

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1. On the social in art and the economics of art, but not exclusively

Hans Abbing's book *The Changing Social Economy of Art, Are the Arts Becoming Less Exclusive?* (2019) is an interdisciplinary approach to the changes that occurred within the world of serious art before, during, and after its peak. In this book, the author examines to what extent the conventions that governed the serious art production, consumption, and market in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century have gradually changed since then, due to the changes in social values and beliefs in the Western world and following the rise of popular art. Abbing's detailed contribution to the ongoing and ever-evolving discussion on the differences between serious and popular art is mainly focused on the decline of public interest in the former and the world's continuing enthusiasm for the latter. Having in mind that the authority of serious art institutions in Europe currently still seems unshakable, this examination of the causes of these alterations in the art market is more than welcome. In addition to that, the present time is just about right for reviewing this Abbing's book because the author is „currently rewriting the book“ and the revised edition will be available in 2022 (as announced on the website that is accompanying this book with the web notes and texts).¹

Abbing's inclination to the „social economy of art“ reflects his educational background in economy and sociology, but also his own experience as a visual artist. Not surprisingly, the book is aimed at several kinds of readers, including artists, art consumers, art managers, cultural entrepreneurs, economists, sociologists, and even aestheticians. Having in mind that an ambitious project of this kind requires careful methodology, Abbing in the introductory chapter of the book carefully defines the main terminology used in the book (and usually illustrates the usage of a term in a particular context). Not presupposing much common knowledge in the book, he usually provides the reader with his own definitions of the concepts such as the „art-world“ (with a hyphen in his spelling, which I will follow in this review, conforming to his habit). Although Abbing in this case does not rely on the usages of the term suggested by Howard Becker or Arthur Danto, his understanding of this concept still very much echoes theirs: „an *art-world* consists of all persons within an overall *world of art* connected with an artform, who have a say in the definition of art in that artform. Together they (...) control the main art-buildings and the official, that is, accredited, art education institutes.“² While Abbing's definitions of the terms used in the book are usually sufficient for the comprehension of its main ideas, some prior knowledge is certainly recommended when it comes to his analyses of more specific problems. This, for example, applies to the parts of the book in which Abbing recalls Pierre Bourdieu's thoughts on the relation between art and social status or certain economic theories such as William Baumol's notion of the „cost disease“. It is worth mentioning that some of the main points in this book are enhanced by Abbing's references to his own experiences as a visual artist, through the thoughts expressed by his female alter-ego, „Anna“. These Abbing's remarks are as interesting and informative as his analyses of various economic and sociological theories or the empirical data.

On the already mentioned website created especially for providing readers with the „web-notes“ and additional „web-texts“ referenced in the various parts of the book, there are multiple ways of getting acquainted with its key points. There are, in fact, four different ways of getting around the topics covered in the book via the website: primarily, there is a long summary (in 10,000 words) consisting of all the main theses presented in the book (including the additional remarks not emphasized by the usage of uppercase letters)³ and a short summary (in 1,500 words) of the most important ideas presented in the book.⁴ Additionally, there is the author's own review of the book, previously published on the website economiststalkart.org,⁵ and lastly, there is also a somewhat extended version of the table of contents, consisting of all the subtitles in the chapters.⁶ Taking into account that the author has provided these ways of scrolling through the topics of the book, in the review I will not limit myself to presenting all the main topics already covered in these web summaries. Instead, I will try to emphasize some more specific points in the book and a couple of interesting examples, as well as the author's personal remarks.

2. Serious art strives, popular art shines - how did it happen?

The book begins with the statement that currently the serious art is „in turmoil“. Although not very cheerful, these words are very well explained throughout the book. This is mostly done via the comparison of various decisions of the serious art institutions, the artists themselves, and the art lovers in the so-called „the period of serious art“ (covering roughly the period between 1880 and 1980) with the procedures developed in the world of serious art before and after this period. In fact, the main structure of almost every subchapter in the book can be described this way. After some general remarks on the problems being presented in a subchapter (e. g. on the importance of authenticity in serious art), Abbing usually extends the topic through the exploration of the relevant social practices that are customary in the mentioned time periods. The author most often refers to the time before, during and after the period of serious art, while the period of the decline of serious art is typically more precisely defined. He regularly talks about the changes occurring in the world of serious art in the last decade or two and occasionally points to the alterations that are currently happening in it. Expectedly, when the author refers to more recent times, he puts more emphasis on contrasting the artistic, social, and economic habits of the world of serious art with those found in the eclectic sphere of popular art. Throughout the book, Abbing is dominantly interested in the changes occurring in the visual arts and music, while some remarks are also made when it comes to the development of dance, theatre, and cinema.

While Abbing extensively criticizes the principles and conventions governing the world of serious art and culture, his intention is not to denounce the art-world of serious art and to conclude that the tradition of serious art should face its destiny by becoming completely irrelevant to the contemporary audience. This is clearly expressed in the conclusion of the book, where the reader will find some more personal Abbing's comments and even hopes when it comes to the future of art: „Art does not have to be grand, but it would be a pity if it were to altogether dissolve and disappear among all sorts of creative activity“. „(...) [I]n spite of all the relativism in this book, this is my wish“.⁷ In one of the last sentences in the book that could very much be one of the first, the author's critique of serious art is disclosed as the expression of his belief that this kind of art should still be produced and should continue to be relevant, but it may need to pursue its future in a different format – by becoming „less exclusive“, as mentioned in the subtitle of the book.

The first chapter of the book is closely focused on the history of serious art and its main characteristics such as its strict separation from the cultural products that possess the entertainment value, its close boundness to the government's subsidies, and the elitists' „gatekeeping“ of the realm of serious art. Even though Abbing writes about the strong

commitment to authenticity in serious art, he also emphasizes the „laziness“ of the serious art producers and institutions caused by the guaranteed financial help from the rich individuals and the authorities. As it will be shown in the rest of the book, it is exactly the flexibility of the world of popular art that led to its growing success in the 20th century. Unlike in the popular arts, today it is increasingly harder to even maintain the heritage of serious art. Abbing points to this fact from the perspective of the art market and the costs of serious art production, talking about the „cost disease“ happening in the current serious art institutions, especially when it comes to organizing concerts of orchestral classical music.

Having in mind the variety of topics opened in the first chapter of the book, It may seem that the subtitle „are the arts becoming less exclusive?“ is, so to say, somewhat „exclusive“ itself. However, by getting familiar with the rest of the book, the reader will start to realize that all these topics – the problems of autonomy, serious art’s denigration of the entertainment and mainstream character of popular art and so forth - are gravitating towards the problem of exclusivity of serious art. Abbing points to the exclusivity of the world of serious art in this chapter by stressing the importance of the „art-buildings“ for the notion of the prestigious and sublime character of serious art, the art that belongs to elitist art lovers who feel „at home“ in these institutions. However, a change in the art market is illustrated in the fact that nowadays, some of these institutions are turned into more user-oriented places that offer the „overall pleasant experience“⁸ to the consumers and attract tourists as well.

3. Should we pay to see *Mona Lisa* „behind 3 cm thick glass“?

In this book, Abbing is not interested in the topics in the field of aesthetics - he explicitly states that he is not concerned with the problems of aesthetic evaluation and claims that the aesthetic form and content are one and the same thing for him. Interestingly, the following chapter opens with the themes closely related to the matters of this discipline, such as problems of the authenticity of the serious artworks and the idea that the arts are always partially reconstructed in the imagination of the consumers. For the author, this discussion is important because the consumers’ dynamic aesthetic experiences often contribute to the pursuit of their identity and the „exploration of one’s self“.⁹ These themes are closely analyzed since all these factors play a role in the market forces of both serious and popular art-worlds. The discussion is further enriched by examining the extent to which the „presence“ of the artist in her artwork adds to this pursuit and to the overall quality of the experience of a serious art piece. It is interesting how Abbing somewhat demystifies Walter Benjamin’s well-known discussion of the „aura“ of the art piece by bounding this topic to the consumer’s search of the artwork’s own history that changes the reception and the meaning of its content. The problems regarding the technical

reproduction of visual artwork are no more relevant to the contemporary consumer, but experiencing the art with the rich history is still interesting for them. Paradoxically, this often stands in the way of the experience itself, as Abbing interestingly illustrates with the example of the „original“ *Mona Lisa* shown behind the “3 cm thick glass giving the painting a greenish glow”.¹⁰ The author’s point is that when it comes to the consumer’s experience, a carefully manufactured reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* would serve a much better purpose.

Turning to a more sociological perspective, Abbing refers to the bourgeois strive for the enrichment of their own lives through the experience of authentic and expressive art pieces. Compared to their habits of experiencing art in a formal, institutionally-controlled atmosphere of art-buildings, the consumption of popular art (and especially popular music) is usually done in the more natural, informal spaces of open-air festivals. The consumers’ opportunity to dance at music festivals, freely move from one to another venue of the same event, consume drinks, and talk to each other, has much contributed to the success of the popular music market in previous decades. A little bit of my experience in coordinating a venue at Nashville jazz festival confirms this is almost a decisive factor for contemporary consumers (even though elitists still think of jazz in terms of high culture and its values). In later chapters, Abbing will emphasize more clearly how serious art establishments have started to copy these successful mechanisms of the organizers of popular art events, and sometimes have even joined them in coordinating an art venue consisting of the works of both serious and popular art. Organizing this kind of events is maybe the most promising way of setting up the inclusion of artists from various backgrounds – thanks to these venues, serious art producers and popular artists get to know each other and collaborate.

4. „Money talks“ about the exclusivity in art

The central chapter of the book is reserved for the topic mentioned in its subtitle: „are the arts becoming less exclusive”? When talking about exclusivity, Abbing refers not only to artworks produced for the educated and rich elite that consumes them in art buildings, but also to the artists themselves and the narrow notion of art profession, restricted largely to white and male people. In the past, this exclusion in the world of serious art was maintained by the authorities within the strictly compartmentalized society, in which lower classes, people of color, and women were mostly suppressed (and sometimes also prohibited) in pursuing a career in arts or even entering the art-buildings. But although this is not the case anymore in the democratized Western world, there are still many mechanisms of exclusion left. Abbing puts much stress on these persistent exclusion practices that somehow fall off the serious art-world’s radar, even though contemporary art institutions are trying to be more inclusive. The first one of them is the

disappointing fact that art made by women still, even in the last decade, sells for „almost half the price“.¹¹ Another is that the so-called „price exclusion“ currently serves as the governing mechanism of the „gatekeeping“ in the world of serious art – high prices keep away people with low income from most of the activities offered by the high culture establishments. The author here not only refers to the unexplainably high prices of visual art pieces – this kind of „consumption“ of serious art (and hopefully the aesthetic experience as well) is reserved solely for those who have money in abundance. More importantly, the „price exclusion“ applies to the prices of the tickets for many events offering serious art, such as classical music concerts or theatre performances. In these cases, as Abbing suggests, „money talks“ – these prices even nowadays express elitist ideas about the serious artworks and its privileged audience.

What is worthy of attention in this chapter is Abbing’s remark that not well-to-do people still want to participate in the events offering serious art. They did not completely lose interest in it, as it is sometimes stated in the articles concerned with the differences between the audiences of serious and popular art. Among those with low income, there are people who would like to occasionally go to the theatre or attend a classical music concert. In addition to the aforementioned way of dividing people by wealth, a similar mechanism contributes to the exclusion occurring within the world of serious art. For example, someone buying cheaper tickets for the concerts or not buying limited editions of the LP records automatically excludes himself from the top-of-the-game consumer elitism in the sphere of serious art. While previously mentioned mechanisms of exclusion are not that common nowadays in the world of popular art, the latter also occurs in it, as Abbing suggests in this chapter.

Examining the inclusion attempts undertaken during the 20th century, Abbing concludes that the so-called „horizontal dissemination“ of serious art (the dissemination occurring within the same class) is indeed somewhat successful, as opposed to the „vertical dissemination“ (aimed at the inclusion of lower-class people), which should be nowadays more encouraged. What should however be discouraged is certainly the ever-present appeal to the exclusivity of serious art, appeal that is still found among the well-to-do people in the contemporary world. While Abbing deeply explores the prehistory of the current behavior of serious art institutions by talking about the practices established during the period of serious art, it is important to note that these historical reflections are here to provoke thoughts on „what ‘can’ be done to make the serious arts (even) more inclusive“.¹² One of Abbing’s answers to this question is that serious art should look up to the market decisions in the world of popular art. This is one of the main points in the book on the social economy of art: if the serious art establishment is unwilling to change its procedures tuned to a different world of more than a century ago, it will seriously endanger its own relevance and even its existence.

5. Is „art for-profit“ the art produced „in the love of money“?

In the fourth chapter of the book, the author is firstly considered with combating the most common prejudices surrounding the matter of dealing with art as a commodity, the world of serious art as an art market, the artists as those who gain profit with an artwork, and art lovers as those who consume art and buy it. Abbing's examination of these themes is more than welcome for readers not very comfortable with the economic discourse on art, but the placement of this analysis within the book is somewhat unexpected. Having in mind that in the first half of the book the author has already discussed the changes in the art market, the ways of providing artists with enough financial help with subsidies, and even the financial disadvantages of the art profession, the readers should be already familiarized with the context of talking about art as a commodity of a special kind. Furthermore, the admirers of Theodor Adorno's critique of treating art as a commodity should be already repulsed with the terminology utilized in the book. However, despite the concerns regarding the placement of this chapter, Abbing's examination of many economic concepts here directly contributes to his investigation of the changes occurring in the production and the consumption of serious art.

One of the points that the author stresses after discussing on the economists' terminology is that the artists creating artworks for profit should not be automatically treated as greedy materialists compromising the quality of their work and freedom of the artistic expression "in the love of money", so to speak. On the contrary, as Abbing suggests, the profit that artists gain with one commissioned artwork can be invested in creating more artworks, or even better art pieces: for example, the profitable artwork will give them a chance to be more autonomous in creating another work or to improve its quality. While exploring the reasons why the world of serious art has mystified the commercial relations inevitably occurring between the artists, art institutions, and the consumers, he emphasizes how this concealment of everything financial is present even nowadays in the world of serious art. That is why, as Abbing argues, the prices of the artworks in the art galleries are not displayed and the financial interactions are oftentimes publicly presented almost as donations. But following the societal changes by which artists cannot simply expect to be subsidized from the authorities, the world of serious art should accept that "cultural entrepreneurship" is not a taboo anymore. Created, promoted, and sold artworks do not become more or less valuable whether artists make them by following their own artistic goals or by being commissioned by the government or a private consumer. The changes in the art market could positively affect artistic production by turning the world of serious art against the "laziness" caused by its simple reliance on the government's finances in the past. But following Abbing's examinations in this chapter, it is important to note that the causes of this enhancement are not solely bound to artists' fear if they are going to make a living in the contemporary world. In the

serious art world driven by market forces, the artists are already being inspired by, in Abbing's words, their "imagined negotiations" with potential commissioners.¹³

Moreover, the author discusses the fact that the serious arts are indeed becoming more creative in these commercially dynamic times by exploring the contemporary artists' tendency to "enrich" their art by adding extras to the artwork itself. Artists (as well as art experts, critics, and marketing agents engaged in these commercial interactions) often do this by providing the audience with additional information about the work, expressing thoughts in the notes attached to the art piece, and even bounding the work to some universal non-artistic values or placing the art in some sort of a narrative. It seems Hegel was right all along – we (still) live in the times in which the art audience strives for the intellectual (and not merely aesthetic) engagement! Lastly, as Abbing suggests in this chapter, the already changed market forces in the world of serious art lead artists to create works that will make the art-world more inclusive. They begin to take into account and apply the demands of the diverse audiences in creating a more user-oriented art. However, their task of achieving this is not in fact that difficult because – as can be guessed – all this has already happened in the realm of popular art.

6. Sharing is even more than caring – Abbing on the future of art

As Abbing has noted in the "Conclusion", the chapter concerned with the importance of sharing art can be read as the closing discussion in the book.¹⁴ It is indeed focused on the application of previously examined inclusion mechanisms. But instead of simply suggesting some of the solutions to the exclusivity matter in the world of serious art, Abbing is showing that the problem of inclusion is rather twofold. The art-world's task is not only to bring serious art to the lower classes but also to suppress the high society's negative inclination towards the sphere of popular art. By doing this, it would lower the strength of the serious art's reoccurring tendencies towards exclusivity and discourage the "gatekeeping". Fortunately, this twofold process is, to a degree, already happening in contemporary times: as Abbing puts it, "higher-educated people have become more omnivorous".¹⁵ Following this, the process of crossing the boundaries between serious and popular art has started occurring in the media as well (especially when it comes to music). But there is still more to be done, and one of the author's recommendations is that the art-buildings should ensure more discounts and thus additionally motivate lower-classes for attending art events. Although some mechanisms of generating exclusivity would inevitably still be present in the serious art market (aimed primarily at more well-to-do art lovers), it is almost a certainty that by attracting more diverse audiences and adapting to their aesthetic demands, the traditional art institutions would keep their relevance in the ever-changing field of cultural industry of the 21st century.

The fact that Abbing has already concluded much of his previous discussions in the chapter “Sharing Art” resulted in a more direct and even personal tone in his actual “Conclusion” (as I have previously hinted). Here the author has truly unpacked his beliefs on the topics covered in the book, and some of them are expressed very straightforwardly, such as his view that societies should not worry much about the arts aimed at rich consumers, for the market will always provide them with the art pieces of their interest. What societies should do is stop subsidizing this kind of art and support the underprivileged groups in their artistic production and consumption. After all, this kind of inclusion has succeeded in the world of popular art even without any government subsidies! But it is important to note that this had not happened accidentally in popular arts – it happened exactly because of the “market forces”. While Abbing claims in his “Conclusion” that “in principle, markets are neither good [n]or bad”,¹⁶ his thoughts expressed throughout the book gravitate towards the idea that the art commerce indeed contributes to the overall inclusion process in the case of serious art. In addition to supporting underprivileged groups, subsidies from the authorities should also be directed at aiding amateur artists in producing serious art pieces, because this will make the world of serious art less restricted to formally trained artists, that are themselves the “gatekeepers” of a sort. Lastly, Abbing expresses his beliefs that these finances should also lead to producing more free art.

7. Final remarks

It is striking how much data Abbing has covered and examined in this book dedicated to the changes in the social and economic relations in the world of serious art. This is why I think this book is a goldmine for a researcher interested in the dynamic creative and commercial circumstances in which serious art was put after its dominance has gradually diminished throughout the 20th century. That being said, I find that the book can be somewhat improved when it comes to communicating the provided data to the theorists. While in this regard the web notes and texts are indeed helpful (and will probably be even more helpful in the future having in mind that they can be further expanded even after the publication of the new version of the book), it is difficult to constantly shift the attention from the book to these webpages. Perhaps this can be avoided by integrating some of the content from the web notes into the book. Moreover, in some cases, the facts were not referenced. I suppose the only reason for this author’s decision was that he didn’t want to overburden the book with the additional notes, but in these situations, the reader cannot easily follow some of the examples and further expand her knowledge on them. Nevertheless, googling the info was certainly helpful in many cases. Above all, it is more than a possibility that the author will review and expand the analyzed data in the rewritten version of the book that is to be published in 2022.

In addition to being valuable to the theorists concerned with the developments taking place in the creative industry of the world of serious art, I believe that Abbing's book could be equally (or even more) interesting to contemporary artists. Consulting all the data he provided on the changes that had occurred in the art market, they can reflect and decide if they are going to participate in the outdated mechanisms of exclusion derived from the traditional world of serious art or assist in combating these self-destructive habits of serious art establishments. For this purpose, Abbing's willingness to share his own experience along with his analysis of the data seems most rewarding. As an amateur musician, while reading some of the parts of the book, I started questioning some of the decisions I have made in cooperating with the bands I have played with and the attitudes I have had with musical event organizers. Moreover, having in mind that Abbing's remarks are written from the perspective of an artist for which the creative process is no enigma, I believe they will also help the readers deeply engaged with the serious art to demystify the „persona“ of an artist and focus more on the artworks themselves. These demystification attempts can be found in some of the examples analyzed in the book, the most interesting being Abbing's opinion on Damien Hirst's statements on his own art. Citing Hirst's words on his famous „spot paintings“ in which the artist claims that the „[e]very single spot painting contains my eye, my hand, and my heart“, Abbing just adds that he finds this statement interesting, taking into account that „of the 1400 spot paintings all but 25 were painted by assistants“.¹⁷ Not analyzing it thoroughly, Abbing makes the example speak for itself. In addition to finding this kind of Abbing's comments amusing, I also think that these reflections very much contribute to the overall understanding of the matters the author examines throughout the book.

¹ Hans Abbing, <https://hansabbing.com>. Accessed March 29, 2021.

² Hans Abbing, *The Changing Social Economy of Art: Are the Arts Becoming Less Exclusive?* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 7.

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⁷ Abbing, *The Changing Social Economy of Art*, 251.

⁸ Abbing, *The Changing Social Economy of Art*, 16-7.

⁹ Abbing, *The Changing Social Economy of Art*, 71.

¹⁰ Abbing, *The Changing Social Economy of Art*, 93.

¹¹ Abbing, *The Changing Social Economy of Art*, 120.

¹² Abbing, *The Changing Social Economy of Art*, 245.

¹³ Abbing, *The Changing Social Economy of Art*, 184.

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¹⁵ Abbing, *The Changing Social Economy of Art*, 222.

¹⁶ Abbing, *The Changing Social Economy of Art*, 247.

¹⁷ Abbing, *The Changing Social Economy of Art*, 70.

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