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**CHALLENGING EVERYDAYS:
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IN EVERYDAY AESTHETICS**

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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.