

THE AESTHETIC AS A MATTER OF PRACTICES: FORM OF LIFE IN EVERYDAYNESS AND ART

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Abstract

A set of phenomena that have been marginalised for a long time are now putting to test the traditional boundaries of aesthetics. Today it's not surprising to find books and essays concerning the «aesthetics» of food and clothing, sport and daily objects and events. Such expansion *de facto* of the topics covered by aesthetics is sufficiently justified by the fact that the fore mentioned phenomena – although it is often difficult to assess their aesthetic significance from a philosophical point of view – have a decisive influence on the current configurations of taste. This role was in the past assigned mainly to art and to its ability in shaping high cultural styles. But nowadays it seems to have become the prerogative of daily life's practices which include design, fashion, tourism, gastronomy, recreational and leisure activities, wellness, wellbeing etc. –in other words the crucible in which life-styles (instead of art-styles) are formed.

Key Words: Aesthetics, Practices, Art, Everyday Life, Normativity.

1. A new context of non-exceptionality

The current undeniable widespread diffusion of aesthetic processes parallels a legitimation crisis of the arts that seems to have entered into an irreversible phase since at least the second half of the Twentieth century, when the separation between «high» and «low» culture became blurred. As a matter of fact, since the advent of pop culture arts seem to have lost their leading role in determining the aesthetic as such. Consequently, the sense of unsuitability affecting the canonical model to which we used to attribute the whole of the aesthetic phenomenon is unsurprising. Pivot of this model is indeed the reference to Great Art as something that differs from any other content of our experience due to its exceptionality. Projected towards the current conditions of experience in general, whose aesthetic component is radical as well as hypertrophic and pervasive, the canonical model risks generating systematic parallax errors. It places primary importance on artistic content while relegating it outside daily life, as a time and a place set aside for the objectification of «pure» aesthetic components. Contrari-

wise, contemporaneity abolishes this sense of strangeness and separation since nowadays the aesthetic undoubtedly intervenes, with presumption and –sometimes– excess, in the continual pursuit of moments of gratification by means of any object to which we relate.

The environments within which we commonly and currently operate are full of objects which undergo radical processes of aesthetic enhancement, to the extent that even paintings, poems, novels, sonatas and symphonies risk seeing their very expressive potential absorbed as a fragment of a virtual and continual slideshow. The «post-industrial» aesthetic can no longer be confined within an ideal and isolated sphere such as the system of fine arts governed by the industrial society. Rather, we regularly make choices relating to pleasure-oriented consumption and based on preferences of taste that defy the criteria for decision making and establishing preference supplied by tradition, whether it be disinterested pleasure or –symmetrically– the pragmatic functionality to be obtained at the lowest possible cost.

In short, a set of phenomena that have been marginalised for a long time are now putting to test the traditional boundaries of aesthetics. Today it's not surprising to find books and essays concerning the «aesthetics» of food and clothing, sport and daily objects and events. Such expansion *de facto* of the topics covered by aesthetics is sufficiently justified by the fact that the fore mentioned phenomena – although it is often difficult to assess their aesthetic significance from a philosophical point of view – have a decisive influence on the current configurations of taste. This role was in the past assigned mainly to art and to its ability in shaping high cultural styles. But nowadays it seems to have become the prerogative of daily life's practices which include design, fashion, tourism, gastronomy, recreational and leisure activities, wellness, wellbeing etc. – in other words the crucible in which life-styles (instead of art-styles) are formed.

If aesthetics has to be more than a collection of past ideas we must get to know this new context, where the diffusion of the aesthetic implies the negation of its exceptionality.

2. Aesthetics between closure and opening

Faced with these challenges, philosophy can respond in three ways, depending on its willingness to modify the «intensio» (the specific features of the content attributed to the concept) and / or the «extensio» (the range of specific objects covered by the concept) of the notion of the aesthetic:

- I) with an intensional and extensional closure;
- II) with an extensional opening but an intensional closure;
- III) with an intensional (and therefore extensional) opening.

I) The first (and perhaps prevailing) way is to respond to the challenge with an actual closure of the concept, both intensionally and extensionally. This occurs when philosophers postulate the immutability of aesthetic characteristics and, at the same time, the inviolability of the boundaries, within which only pertinent phenomena should be sought. In this case, in order to assert its purity as a discipline, aesthetics generally keeps assuming Great Art as its exclusive thematic field of choice, a trend that has increasingly characterized the last two centuries. Any other aesthetic manifestation is considered aberrant and cast aside. Who advocates this approach often adopts a conservative stance on the system of arts and is reluctant to recognize the legitimacy of creative and expressive forms unrelated to traditional ones. All this occurred during the Twentieth century with photography, cinema, design, fashion..., not to mention everyday practices.

II) A second way is hoping for an exclusively extensional opening. In such a case, without questioning the –so to speak– consolidated genetic patrimony of the aesthetic, philosophers also acknowledge its occurrence in phenomena outside the boundaries of tradition. Those who adopt this stance are also willing to take into consideration different forms of aesthetic expression, yet on condition that the latter is ultimately compatible with the categorial framework of Great Art, for they are for instance liable to, or derived from, a process of «artification» (see Naukkarinen 2012). It's clear that this approach makes the system of arts flexible, but does not question the essential reference to art (however it may be defined) as the criterion for determining the aesthetic.

III) A third way is, on the contrary, promoting an opening that is intensional and *therefore* also extensional. This includes the attempts to requalify the very notions of «aesthetic» and «aesthetics», in such a way as to determine within these terms an extension which allows for a restructuring of the whole area. Based upon a different principle of legitimacy, this area extends to original phenomena, unforeseen or until recently considered to be incompatible with the traditional field of research. In such a case, the enquiry is not resolved by the simple enlargement of the extensional universe, but it actually generates such enlargement as a consequence of an internal fracture within the paradigm of the aesthetic and aesthetics, due to an altered recognition of the characteristics that are attributable to the phenomenon.

If it's true that the problem to be addressed is the incongruity between on the one hand the exceptionality of art presupposed by the traditional conception and on the other hand the common widespread reality of the aesthetic in the current context, then the final option, although more daring, is perhaps the most intriguing and promising.

This option is only feasible if emancipated from previous models. Incidentally, it should be noted that we can't avoid the difficulties due to the emphasis on Great Art by merely posing a similar emphasis on nature and on the aesthetic experience of it. We

should not overlook the fact that today our relationship with nature is intrinsically mediated by well established aesthetic practices. In actual fact, the kind of nature of which we have an aesthetic experience is that of the «landscape», whose main catalyst for our attention is either a feature shaped by human intervention or a (possible) visual gratifying framing. All the more so because the standard environmental scenes typical of contemporary life are, if not the genuinely virtual ones, the exclusively artificial ones that since at least the second half of the Nineteenth century are exemplified by the metropolis and its «urban landscapes». So if we set the starting point for the determination of the aesthetic in the experience of «nature», it appears quite difficult to tell how deeply we remain entangled in schemes that are taken for granted.

Therefore, to the extent that the models that have previously inspired aesthetic reflections (the experience of both Great Art and nature) lose effectiveness, it seems worth venturing on the last direction. And as a first step we have to ask ourselves how, and according to what criteria, we can approach the issue in such a way as to obtain first of all a useful intensional reconsideration of the aesthetic.

3. Discontinuistic and continuistic options

A line of research that has recently been developed in an attempt to answer this question and do justice to the modern-day aesthetic wealth, is the so-called Everyday Aesthetics. This line of research invites us to focus on elements that would otherwise be excluded from the sphere of aesthetic pertinence, as Sherri Irvin (2009, p. 136) points out: given that «objects and activities not essentially connected to art or nature can have aesthetic properties and / or [...] can give rise to significant aesthetic experiences», then aesthetic analysis has to be «appropriately extended to virtually all areas of life». This does not mean that we have to avoid any reference to art. As Wolfgang Iser maintains, «art is certainly a particular important province in the universe of meanings of the aesthetic». The problem is, rather, that it is not the only one:

Today's immediacy of the aesthetic results from exactly this, that the conventional equation of aesthetics and art has become untenable, and that other dimensions of the expression have moved into the foreground. That's why—for the benefit of the full concept of the aesthetic and also for the benefit of art—one must take steps against the narrowing of the aesthetic to what is artistic, why one must keep aesthetics clear of this obsolete constriction. (Iser 1996, pp. 11-12)

But is it really possible to think of art and everyday life as analogous or even as homologous from an aesthetic viewpoint? And how can this be done? This remark implies the reconsideration of the relationship that exists between everyday life and art, within the aesthetic domain, and that can be of either (A) discontinuity or (B) continuity.

A) If we were to adopt a purely discontinuistic position, the aesthetic inquiry would be limited merely to proceed on a dual-system of analysis, one relating to art and the other to everyday life. Thus we could assure that aesthetics as such maintains its rights over the analysis of experience attributable to Great Art, whereas the aesthetic problem of daily experience would be reduced to a matter entrusted to an essentially different field of knowledge. But then the common denominator of the two areas would be only nominal, if not a confusing factor. From an intensional point of view, we would simply assert the traditional concept of the aesthetic as regards art and, in addition to it, we should try to coin a brand new concept of something homonymous as regards other experiential areas. Moreover within such a position the crucial question of how the two forms of the aesthetic dimension split up and how their conflict could be generated (as in the current context), would remain unresolved for it would be then taken for granted. This is a question we will have to return to.

B) Moving in the direction of a continuistic solution would seem to promise a more fruitful approach, not least because –as Thomas Leddy claims (2012, p. 11)– it avoids that «blindness to continuity» that leads to «the attempt to explain aesthetic experience in terms of something non-aesthetic, to see aesthetic properties as dependent on non-aesthetic properties», thus replicating «a mistake comparable to the attempt by ethicists to derive moral statements from statements of fact».

This position presents in turn two options.

B1) One is attributable to the typical programme of aestheticism: turning life into a work of art. This, however, certainly does not validate the plan of assigning specific significance to the aesthetic dimension of daily life. Aestheticism represents a false solution to the problem to the extent that it still remains inherently loyal to the model based on the exceptionality of Great Art, a model which life itself should aim to resemble. It must be noted that generally the attempt to elevate life to art does not (necessarily) mean the acknowledgment of the aesthetic value outside of art, but rather it implies (or can imply) the corroboration of the paradigmatic value of art as such.

B2) The other continuistic option is that of considering art as an accentuation and intensification of aesthetic elements already operative in common experience, thus making a Copernican revolution of the system of relations between the world of art and everyday life. According to this option, taking art as the basis for determining the aesthetic proves to be an *hysteron proteron* since the access keys for the understanding of art also derive from our interaction with the environment and its intrinsic aesthetic endowment. Thus here we finally find a position where art is not able to exert a hierarchical supremacy against other phenomena that are equally internal to the aesthetic field. As a consequence this position can be labelled as an aesthetic egalitarianism.

4. The two levels of the aesthetic

An important advantage that can be drawn from the aesthetic egalitarianism is the fact that it would allow a basic justification of the current pandemic spread of aestheticization. It is exactly because from the aesthetic point of view there are no absolute boundaries marking solutions of continuity between art and common experience, that the criteria of taste are liable to apply not only to works of art but to daily events as well. This question, though, deserves more careful attention.

When we speak of the presence of «aesthetic elements in everyday life» we have to point out an important distinction between two levels that are often confused. To bring this distinction into focus we should remember Walter Benjamin's warning not to confuse the two possible ways of exploiting the relationship between aesthetics and politics issuing from the «changes in the medium of present-day perception» (Benjamin 1936, p. 23) due to new technologies: the aestheticization of politics, that makes an ideological and repressive use of these technologies; and the politicization of aesthetics, that fosters an emancipatory use of them (Benjamin 1936, pp. 41-42). Similarly, while speaking of a widespread diffusion of the aesthetic in everydayness, it is necessary to take into account the diversity, and interaction, between:

B2, i) the everyday dimension of the aesthetic (i.e. the possibility of experiencing an aesthetic content outside the realm of art anytime in our life);

B2, ii) the aesthetic dimension of everyday life (i.e. the potential presence of some aesthetic factor in the structure of our experience).

B2, i) The everyday dimension of the aesthetic constitutes what we might call the *hyper*-aesthetic level. This tends towards the exaggeration of the process of diffusion of the aesthetic which we have known for some time in the strongest forms of aestheticization. Its manifestations often have a robust ideological component which takes advantage of aesthetic pervasiveness, but produces, however, an abstract *imago* of it. At this level aestheticization merely «means the furnishing of reality with aesthetic elements, a sugar-coating of the real with aesthetic flair» (Welsch 1996, p. 2), and therefore it appears as a superficial embellishment of reality that is easy to obtain in the same way in which art has been the Sunday amusement park of industrial society –if not for the fact that the entertainment, or at least the feeling of being entertained must now seem available at anytime, in any place, and therefore no longer confined to a museum. So this kind of everyday aesthetic content can rival art for dominance within the same field, and allowing that the former prevailed, then art would tend to submit to it eventually by taking on the traits of the so-called «spectacularization». Although its logic and forms of fulfilment are extremely complex and refined, it's almost trivial to observe that the most cunning exploitation of this level is found in advertising and in commodification processes, and the lifestyle that best corresponds to it is the one inspired by hedonism and consumerism.

B2, ii) On the other hand, the aesthetic dimension of everyday life constitutes what we might call the *hypo*-aesthetic level. If the first level prompts to ostentation, the second level works mostly tacitly and contributes to structure and shape the interaction with the environment. Here we find various phenomena that involve first and foremost common experience, for the aesthetic dimension is at least a potential feature of the human experience as such in its imaginative, emotive and expressive import.

If we want to talk about aestheticization from this point of view, we should refer to what Welsch calls the «deep-seated» level of it, which affects the very structure of reality, particularly in today's context where reality loses its substantial trait thanks to its novel, virtual constitution that is determined by technological devices. In this sense Welsch claims that «today's aestheticization is by no means merely a thing of *beaux esprits*, or of the postmodern muse of amusement, or of superficial economic strategies, but results very much from fundamental technological changes, from the hard fact of the production process» (Welsch 1996, p. 4). But it would be wrong to think that similar processes have appeared for the first time in, and belong exclusively to the contemporary world. We can trace this kind of processes back to the basic fact that human beings have always «created» their reality through aesthetic devices (including word and image when not used simply to denote something). Therefore, the fact that the hypo-aesthetic level can assume a fundamental relevance for the present age, given that –after losing every fundamentalist orientation criteria– only the aesthetic dimension seems able to provide some useful hints, is unsurprising:

In these processes, the *Homo Aestheticus* is becoming the new role model. He is sensitive, hedonistic, refined and, above all, of discerning taste –and he knows: you can't argue about taste. This affords new security amidst the insecurity which exists all round. Free of fundamentalist illusions, casually distanced, he enjoys all life's opportunities. (Welsch 1996, p. 6)

In order to stress the distinction between the two levels («hyper» and «hypo») we could also maintain that what Welsch calls a «deep-seated» aestheticization coincides at least partially with a recent development of a dimension that is intrinsic to human experience and that constitutes a peculiar «form of life» (in Wittgenstein's terms: see Matteucci 2013 and 2015), where the sense of reality is mediated through practices of taste instead of other kinds of skills. In this sense, the analysis of the aesthetic might coincide with an investigation concerning elements that essentially constitute human nature and that by far exceed the narrow scope of mere knowledge. So, in order to be as clear as possible, we could use the term «aestheticization» only in relation to the hyper-aesthetic level and speak of «aesthetic form of life» in relation to the hypo-aesthetic level.

The permeability between these two levels should constitute one of the crucial topics around which an anthropology of the contemporary revolves, i.e. an anthropology which intends to scrupulously examine the principal aesthetic characteristics of current reality that have become both pervasive and elusive. Moreover such an approach would support the continuistic premise as regards the relationship between art and daily life. Thereby it would make aesthetics also congruent with the current results produced by processes within which art is sublimated to a «gaseous state», to use Yves Michaud's effective metaphor (2003).

5. The need for a criterion

The alternative approaches that have been developed for addressing the relationship between art and everyday life within the aesthetic domain can be summarized by the following scheme:

- A) discontinuistic option: art and everyday life belong to two different fields;
- B) continuistic option: art and everyday life belong to the same field:
 - B1) aestheticism: life must be elevated to art;
 - B2) aesthetic egalitarianism: art intensifies basic aesthetic elements.

The second alternative (B2) is the most fruitful if we want to analyse the crucial and ambiguous issue of aestheticization. It requires in turn the distinction between:

B2, i) everyday dimension of the aesthetic (*hyper*-aesthetic level: aestheticization *stricto sensu*);

B2, ii) aesthetic dimension of everyday life (*hypo*-aesthetic level: aesthetic form of life).

An analysis of the combination between «hyper» and «hypo» levels cannot attribute symmetric importance to both levels. Indeed, only the second level assumes a useful function in terms of clarifying potential aestheticizing processes. It is possible to develop a «hyper-aesthetics» (see Di Stefano 2012) that examines manifestations which are generally impressive, particularly dense on a symbolic and communicative level, and which often compete with Great Art to assume a leading role in the determination of taste once again by virtue of their exceptionality. Nevertheless, whether understood as an extension of art, or as substitutes / alternatives to art, such manifestations presume that the aesthetic has an ability to impact on everyday life, within which they act as factors that amplify a potential that is nonetheless taken for granted. In cases where everyday life does not possess this potential, we would hope in vain to conform it to the dynamics of sensationalism, which flares up when the spectacularity characterizing today's «excited society» is introduced but, at the same time, has a long history, since «sensation seeking» connotes far more than the contemporary human condition (Türcke 2002).

As a consequence, a crucial role must be attributed to an investigation into the hypo-aesthetic innervation of the everyday, perhaps stemming from the idea that there is an intrinsic aesthetic factor in each experience that involves –as Sherry Irvin writes– «my imparting a certain shape or texture to a small part of my life, over and above any other goal I might be aiming to fulfil» (Irvin 2008, p. 32). However, it should be noted that in such a case there is a greater risk of using the aesthetic as some sort of «universal currency», almost as if it were an easy and uncritical shortcut for describing any content in general. Therefore, there exists an evident need to identify a criterion, a sufficiently distinctive principle that enables the detection of the aesthetic *per se* within everyday experience.

In this regard, it is useful to draw a comparison with John Dewey and his distinction between «experience» and «*an* experience»:

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living. Under conditions of resistance and conflict, aspects and elements of the self and the world that are implicated in this interaction qualify experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges. Oftentimes, however, the experience had is inchoate. Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into *an* experience. There is distraction and dispersion; [...]. In contrast with such experience, we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfilment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. [...] Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an* experience. (Dewey 1934, p. 42)

According to Dewey an event can only be classed as aesthetic if it constitutes «*an* experience» by virtue of qualities that would also extend, in accordance with a continuous link, to works of art: closure, unity, adequate complexity and awareness. Within Dewey's theory, the term «aesthetic» designates this whole set of qualitative traits, wherever they may emerge (Dewey 1934, pp. 44-46), thus proving its pervasiveness. As a basic value of experience gathered on a qualitative level, and a transversal if not necessarily ongoing function, the aesthetic is a principle of articulation and interruption within the experiential fabric, yet also a link of continuity between everyday life and the artistic. Can we say that this experiential function is the criterion for identifying the aesthetic as such?

Those who operate in the field of Everyday Aesthetics frequently blame Dewey for establishing overly restrictive constraints (but see Puolakka 2014). Against these constraints they remind the numerous moments in which we enjoy an aesthetic value without being able to identify qualities of closure, unity, complexity and awareness. In fact, in many ways, the very proposal of an Everyday Aesthetics seems to be programmatically based on the idea of reducing, if not completely eliminating, the link that

supposedly unites the aesthetic with such qualities. As such, it may be said that Deweyan qualities are limited in so far as they belong to works of art and therefore serve surreptitiously (and paradoxically, considering the motivations of *Art as Experience*) as a model for the general concept of the aesthetic. By making this criticism, one adopts, almost fatally, an approach that accentuates the distance between everyday life and the artistic. Indeed discontinuistic positions within Everyday Aesthetics, like that of Saito (2007), give rise to a dual system, which draws attention to the everydayness relegating it in a sphere that is separated from that of art. This is because they do not solve the problem of finding a real criterion to single out the aesthetic in the continuum of life experience. And even if we have already mentioned the reasons for our dissatisfaction with mere discontinuism, it is worth reconsidering the problem, given that the controversy with Dewey's theory means that a question that we had left open at first is now unavoidable.

Each interruption implies the identification of both the point of difference between two domains that must be separated, and of the level upon which that point of difference is situated. Dewey's position is continuistic because the juxtaposition that he emphasises is not between everyday life and art. For Dewey, the differential element lies within experience and concerns processes that can count towards both everyday life and the artistic; and the qualities of closure, unity, complexity and awareness don't concern something «exceptional» (a term that Dewey never makes use of in *Art as Experience...*) but something simply «meaningful», and not in a cognitive sense. In this regard, we could say that the juxtaposition is experiential rather than ontological. It is because they ignore this stratification, that discontinuist theorists who criticise Dewey misunderstand his point of view. They reduce the problem to an ontological difference between artistic content and everyday content that, despite both being «aesthetic», should be reciprocally distinguished. Whether these contents are ascribed to the subjective or to the objective component, the question remains unresolved. The identification of a mental state that initially and specifically distinguishes the experience of the aesthetic in everyday life succumbs to the same vicious circles of every similar investigation, given that it simply presumes the difference that it should justify. On the other hand, every list of objective characteristics which should identify the qualifying content of an experience (at the same time aesthetic and everyday, but not artistic) is exposed to the risk of essentialism and is therefore prone to contradictions based on counter-examples that can be easily found in the uncertain field we are considering.

We leave all of these aporias behind if we abandon discontinuism at the level of subjective or objective contents, to instead investigate the relational field of the aesthetic form of life –as Dewey also attempts to do– in order to trace distinctive traits within it that are inherent to the ways in which everyday life is articulated when it takes on aesthetic significance. The distinctive criterion for the aesthetic, for what we consider aesthetically valuable, should underlie an increasing or achieved matching be-

tween the various experiential (subjective as well as objective) components. It must consist of a peculiar connotation of the whole field.

6. The normativity of the aesthetic

In order to get round the risks posed by discontinuism without sacrificing the establishment of a common distinctive criterion for the aesthetic, we must therefore investigate the hypo-aesthetic level more carefully. The latter is a *relational* field, since every form of life implies interaction. Therefore its specific features cannot derive from ontological qualities of an isolated element within it, be it the subject or the object. Rather, in order to understand the peculiarities of the aesthetic relationship it is better to examine the status of the forms in which that relational field finds an overall expression: utterances and gestures of (dis-)liking that emerge in our interaction with the environment. Thus we have to move away from the ontological sphere and into the field of predicates and judgements.

One way to highlight the peculiarities of aesthetic predicates that can match such a distinctive character is pursued by Thomas Leddy, who tries to bring them into focus through the analysis of a principle that would play the role of a discriminating factor in everyday life: the notion of «aura». Although he explicitly refers to Benjamin, Leddy amends this notion in a phenomenological sense when he maintains that, on the one hand, «an aesthetic property is one in which the aesthetic object takes on ‘aura’ within experience» (Leddy 2012, p. 128) and, on the other hand, «from the phenomenological perspective, aura is an aspect of the noema or intentional object of any experience characterized as aesthetic» (Leddy 2012, p. 129). According to this interpretation, aura is not something factual as other properties are. It is rather an extra-factual index of discrimination (a noematic one) that intensifies the properties possessed by an object to the extent that the latter is experienced, i.e. related to a subject. Therefore aura emerges in certain circumstances, as a «characteristic» of the entire field that is able to transform a common experience into an aesthetic one:

although aura is what aesthetic properties have in common, in that if a thing has an aesthetic property it has aura, aura itself is perhaps not best referred to as a property. (I have no problem calling it a characteristic.) When something has a property, for example a car having the property of redness, it is supposed to be like some person owning property. Thus «property» implies something that can be added to or subtracted from the thing which has it (hair, for example can gain or lose the property of whiteness), unless of course the property is essential. Aura, however, is not some detachable part of the thing-as-experienced. Rather it is an intensification of that thing or its qualities. (Nor does a thing lose its essential nature when it loses aura). (Leddy 2012, p. 135)

As a characteristic, and not a property, aura discloses the dimension of the aesthetic predication, that thereby appears distinct and discontinuous with the merely constative predication. It is a kind of peculiar light that transfigures ordinary objects and events within their relation to a subject, and doesn't derive at all from the non-aesthetic qualities possessed by the same objects and events. So aesthetic judgements that embody the corresponding predications are located on a level that has nothing to do with mere factual perception, as Leddy maintains against the supervenience theory with a reference to Hume's distinction between «is» and «ought»:

aesthetic judgments are *never* supported by reference to non-aesthetic features. The point is similar to Hume's idea that we cannot derive «ought», or value statements, from «is», or factual statements. It is based on a claim about word-meaning. (Leddy 2012, p. 146)

The phenomenological amendment of the notion of aura proposed by Leddy reveals, however, a problematic aspect of the distinctive criterion at issue meant as a factor of *discrimination*. It is exactly because it is conceived of as inherent to the noematic (extra-factual and intentional) pole, that aura appears a sort of formal apriori of the aesthetic experience, although concerning everydayness. As a consequence, it also results devoid of that dialectical tension towards the «non-auratic» that is necessary in order to avoid a dogmatic use of this notion, as Adorno already stressed when criticizing all those, too simplistic uses that have been made of Benjamin's conceptions. In other words, as a formal apriori aura helps discriminate the aesthetic component, but it doesn't allow an insight into the ways its genesis occurs. So to speak, it enters the scene suddenly without showing any trace of the specific difference which –on the contrary– should justify the aesthetic in its heterogeneity from the non-aesthetic. That's why the aesthetic connotation seems here to pertain to something «extraordinary», a sort of mild form of exceptionality.

A first and partial correction of this formal conception might be to still use the concept of aura in order to distinguish the aesthetic import of daily life, but in a historical sense. All this is pursued by Yves Michaud, who uses the same concept to characterize the vicarious functions performed today by fashion and tourism since art no longer has a leading role. These functions are embodied in aestheticization processes that are fostered by the pursuit of auratic moments in an age in which –following Benjamin's diagnosis– art has lost its auratic character but the «need for aura, even if it is a false one» persists, since «we need sensation, even if it cannot consist but in our feeling ourselves feel [*même si elle ne consiste qu'à se sentir sentir*]» and «we need identity and reference points, even if they might change along with fashion» (Michaud 2003, p. 185). Everyday's aura then emerges as a historical compensation, i.e. as an element that bears the traces of its difference from both the current impoverished reality of art and other common experiences which are not characterized by it. It remains, however, a formal ele-

ment of discrimination, since it is still used as a label that can describe historical phenomena, even though on the basis of a shift from the domain where it arose (art) to a new domain where it now thrives (the everyday).

We can overcome this *impasse* if we find a way to make up for the material as well as the historical status that connotes the distinctive criterion of the aesthetic. This means that the problem doesn't simply concern the categorization of phenomena, but also the specific way they get structured within experience through actions that express the aesthetic character of an experiential interaction. Only by expressing in a certain gesture or judgement a state of affairs, the latter acquires and shows aesthetic relevance as a kind of paradoxical «both analytic and a posteriori» attribute. And this particular form of characterization does not depend on a formal categorization but it is an immanent content of the experience that distinguishes the human being as such. Actually it is by virtue of it that human beings can directly experience the (un-)familiarity of their environment, which appears fraught with aesthetic connotations. These, in fact, inherently provide an articulation of it either as «threatening» or «attractive», «unpleasant» or «pleasant», «ugly «or» beautiful », thus distinguishing it from what is rather neutral. The distinctive principle of the aesthetic has then an anthropological nature rather than a historical one. It's not a matter of something exceptional or extraordinary, but of something that appears *pointful* in our interaction with the environment and thereby discloses the possibility of a meaningful organization of our experience.

In light of this anthropological and relational nature, the principle of the aesthetic cannot be regarded as merely subjective. In other words, this pointfulness has a binding character that –since it does not derive from objective ontological properties– should be traced back to the roots of becoming appropriate, of improvement, and of becoming shared of judgements, or rather of the willingness to agreement and criticism, as has been proposed by various scholars, who openly follow in Kant's footsteps (Dowling 2010, Ratiu 2012, Forsey 2013). We would be guaranteed to encounter an aesthetic content when discussing the methods of qualifying appearances with others, acknowledging that the judgements of others must nevertheless be respected. Thus, an aspiration for universal validity would emerge as an intrinsic characteristic of the aesthetic in its lowest and most widespread status as a form of life, to be understood in exactly the same way as Kant describes the claim of the judgement of taste, as collectively agreed. This implies both the idea of a *sensus communis* and therefore of an intersubjective undertaking. Thus, as observed by Ratiu (2012, p. 400), «the possibility of individuals to judge by mere feelings but also to share and communicate feelings / pleasures or experiences» constitutes the core that even in the everyday distinguishes pointful aesthetic from pointless non-aesthetic experiences.

As a consequence, the distinctive criterion becomes a normative one, because it either establishes or implies a rule for discussing an experience under a peculiar aspect and so our possibility of (mis-)understanding each other as regards the use of a certain

characterization, the meaning of a certain word. The aesthetic form of life involves specific (but not determined) grammars.

7. The expressive grammar of the aesthetic

The identification of this normative (grammatical) feature makes it possible to escape from an ambiguity that troubles some theorists of Everyday Aesthetics. Sometimes they rebuff every rigid demarcation standard out of fear of adopting a prescriptive behaviour inspired above all by Great Art; at the same time they fall back into an old-fashioned contemplatist attitude, because they only assert the value of experiences where –for instance– the body is an instrument of enjoyment. But this mere assertion does not grasp the peculiarity of the aesthetic as a catalyst of very special predicates. As Wittgenstein (1967, p. 2) observes, a predicate like «beautiful» doesn't function as a label to denote (or connote) a determined thing. It is a sort of «gesture» or «facial expression» (we can replace it with whatever sign of liking) by which we accomplish an experience that demands our intervention for its fulfilment. Given its expressive and performative status it is public: it appeals to our at least potential agreement with other people, whose presumed presence so contributes to the emergence of a constraint that is the implicit rule we are obeying and that finds its exemplification in our expressive performance.

Such regulative normativity of the aesthetic predication improperly becomes prescriptive only if it is obtained from an already structured cultural field as the field of Great Art, with its institutions, can be. This can be avoided if, within a context that is not yet consolidated, we grasp the normative feature as a generating cell of those same cultural fields. Those who limit themselves to the fact that «with the everyday, one is often locked to one degree or another in a private world, without the conventions of publicity and inter-subjectivity that mark the art world» (Melchionne 2011, p. 442) enter into the arduous path of the defence of the privacy of these phenomena, and simply miss the point.

The root of this normative feature has been highlighted by Roger Scruton (2007) in the framework of an analysis of the motives that guide our choices (or preferences) when criteria of instrumental usefulness are not yet or no more to be considered by us. In these cases a whole range of possibilities lies ahead of us, and we can find our way only through mere appearance. The choices we make here, despite tending to concern appearances, demonstrate that they have a certain rationale, simply because they are the object of intersubjective discussion. From an anthropological standpoint, the phenomenon is considerably relevant, bearing in mind the large number of cases in which human beings have, since the dawn of time, found themselves in similar situations, standing out because they, also in these cases, behave in a way that they are willing to justify. The act of showing preference is aesthetic to the extent that it is bound to ap-

pearance and not to the true and proper epistemic construction. It has a peculiar status, because its justification depends on a normativity that is difficult to analyse, and therefore the prominent element or the value that guides she / he who performs such normativity remains largely undefined. As it is impossible to ascertain if such choices are objectively justifiable and even which role they will take in the life of a rational being, they run the risk of being considered a mere residual element after, so to speak, 'proper' decisions (i.e. decisions which are referable to instrumental or epistemic rationality) have been taken. But the seemingly ephemeral act of showing preference is erroneously likened to an arbitrary way of accepting one option from the infinite possible options (Scruton 2007, p. 240). On the contrary, we can trace this back to a type of reasoned dialogue –even if it is fictional and often only a possibility– which guarantees or rather demands some agreement for potential judgements expressed by anyone interested in the decisions we need to make.

The «residuality» of the aesthetic as a *redundancy closing device*, in which appearance assumes a prevailing role (Scruton 2007, p. 244), is the background premise that prompts rational argumentation, attempts to establish accountability of choices that have been made, in an inextricable plot of expressivity and activity. The aesthetic experience of the everyday is woven together by this plot. The principles of meaning and value are seemingly gathered within the everyday, allowing for the managing of processes, which are articulated through formulae, by which we make the experience accountable. This draws on an expressive level (imaginative, «poietic», productive) rather than on a factual one:

the door looks right to the carpenter who chooses it, and this «looking right» leads him to interpret the appearance, by seeing things in it that it does not literally contain. The door has, in his eyes, a natural, easy-going, and honest appearance. It calls to mind the shape and style of a way of life. The doorframe is not just preferred but interpreted, and the interpretation involves metaphors, analogies, and oblique and associative references to things that have nothing in themselves that is door-like –honesty, domesticity, and so on. (Scruton 2007: p. 245)

The ability to handle these situations with *practices* of taste emanates from an interest in appearances, which is institutive of the world of art too, not vice versa, since expressive (and therefore imaginative and truly human) characterisations intertwined with our perception derive from this ability.

8. Back to the arts today

Such a normative component is in accordance with a vision not derived from the paradigm of Great Art. It is a model that is well-suited to contemporary practices that predominantly shape one's taste when everyday phenomena –in which the aesthetic

content becomes radically fluid, continuous, widespread, immediate and shared— are being tasked with fulfilling and poignantly sensitive contents as well, and as fully as possible.

As already stated at the beginning of this contribution, such expansion of the aesthetic comes into conflict with traditional identifying elements aimed at prompting a consensus on «what art is» within the institutionalised conception of art itself, which inspired by the presumed exceptionality of the latter. As a matter of fact, the difficulty to abandon the idea of an exceptional or extraordinary nature of the aesthetic also in everyday life proves how these elements survive when trying to reflect on the aesthetic as such.

Therefore a discrepancy comes into force between the set of categories which we make reference to in order to clarify our aesthetic experience and the practical competence which we rely on during the actual experience of the aesthetic. These are two different and incomparable kinds of knowledge, both often tacit but according to different modalities. We can label the first one as the «common sense *about* the aesthetic»: a form of thematic knowledge, a know-that, regarding a potential definition of a determined aesthetic content. On the contrary, the second kind of knowledge, the practical one, constitutes our «aesthetic common sense»: a form of competence, a know-how that concerns and supports the ability to manage and enjoy an aesthetic experience while exploiting the normative criterion of its pointfulness. The first is the paradigm to which the thematisation of the aesthetic remains persistently loyal when we attempt any reflection, yet which only finds complete validation in segments that today are increasingly residual with regards to current practices, almost like an ideological relic; the second is the tacit weaving that is intrinsic to forms of behaviour which pervade the preferences of taste and that is rooted in the very moments in which we undertake an aesthetic experience. But if all this is sufficiently true, we should find any trace of the peculiar traits characterizing the aesthetic form of life also in the way *artistic* contents are created and experienced, particularly nowadays, when the diffusion of the hyper- and hypo-aesthetic level is so widespread. In other words, can we derive a new model for the *artistic* experience that fits the «aesthetic common sense»?

At the centre of the standard, «exceptionalist» model is the work of art as something to determine, if not to define. In relation to that, specific institutions were born, which certify such an entity, by issuing, as it were, its «identity cards» (i.e. academies as authorised sites for imparting artistic knowledge, where we learn to produce works of art; museums as sites clearly intended not to preserve art, but the works of art...). In our institutionalised world, art is not shown unless it is a work of art and so the legitimacy of something as an artwork is an ever-increasing point of contention. The actors on stage are defined consequently:

- the *author*, as the person who has skilfully produced the work;
- the *consumer*, as the person who fittingly enjoys the work;

– the *critic*, as the person who competently draws out the meaning of the work.

Precisely such a role-based system, still inherent to the «common sense *about* the aesthetic», collapses in the modern-day «aesthetic common sense», since even in traditional arts' institutional sites (ranging from biennial festivals to workshops and web portals) we can no longer find art objects, but rather substitutes for the direct relationship with the objectivity of the artworks, mediated by the use of technology. Enjoying artistic content by means of a digital device exempts from the drive to directly grab such content. Not because it truly replaces it, but because the experience that it produces moves onto a different level, thus even the potential direct contact with a content takes place alongside the modality and styles of the virtual relationship. The work gets increasingly experienced through appliances rather than with one's own eyes. For example, even a painted image can enter a person's aesthetic background more as a photograph or a screen picture rather than as viewed without artificial mediations.

The current change in the nature of aesthetic *practices* raises forms that are dissolved in events planned through a true and proper *design*. This also changes the cluster of concepts that govern the institutions of the artistic world.

i) The concept of the individual author is replaced by the concept of *widespread authorship*. This presumes a not completely distinguishable and rather cooperative conjunction of competencies, as clearly happens in expressive contexts connected with the so-called «cultural and creative industry», such as cinema, television and fashion. Additionally in the framework of more traditional arts, the widespread technique of using materials or fragments having in themselves aesthetic value because pointful or meaningful demonstrates that a single act of creation is conceived of as related to a plural network of creative experiences generating malleable structures.

ii) The concept of fruition is replaced by that of *collective reception and recreation*, which can both aggregate and make uniform, but which as a rule (at least virtually) presents itself or passes itself off as active. It appeals to the spectators' ability to collaborate directly and immediately to the outcome without any contemplative suspension, which on the contrary is almost a factor of disturbance because it interrupts the course of the «performance».

iii) The concept of criticism is replaced by that of *recommendation* (or journalistic reports that have been more or less commented on), which prepares the taste of a public called to evaluate according to an average judgement, which almost exempts from individual discrimination.

Through these transformations, the artwork has progressively become dematerialised. It has become a *device designed* to generate experiential flows that have the effect of shaping a taste detached from individual objects, so as to vary the consequent exercise of preferences on any type of content. The identification of well-defined objects is

replaced by the articulation of a flowing *continuum* that must not be interrupted and which, as a result, demands purely superficial articulations, ever more contracted in the single moment. This is what fashion achieves, and it is exactly for this reason that it has become the logical matrix of the aesthetic, in its being a fast-paced and cyclic dialectics between the new and the obsolescent, which is orthogonal to the wish to eternalise purely «artistic» contents. This kind of experience is quite another thing altogether when compared to the educated and focussed individual dwelling that is static to the point of paralyzing the body, and which is implied by the artistic ideal. Marking rhythm takes the place of setting labels, as we can see in the striking contrast between the musical enjoyment which occurs in a concert hall and the musical consumption in a stadium. The new topic for aesthetic analysis is no longer the experience of something, but the experience *with* something. And this is the source of the current pervasive force of the aesthetic, a reservoir of experiential intensification in a reality connoted by the saturation of functional needs, as those who work in marketing know only too well.

In this field, the normativity of the aesthetic experience is distinguished by a communicability and shareability of taste that implies cooperation and collectivity, as well as the typical aggregating quality of designed devices, with which we interface on a day-to-day basis. Responsible for invalidating the prerogatives of the standard «art-centric» model are, sure enough, *new technologies*, which in recent years have reached extraordinary heights in the area of digitalisation and interactivity, paving the way for an ever more virtual reality, which evidences the fact that it is no longer the tangible in itself that counts, but the experiential processes triggered by the tangible. Accessibility, speed, flow, scroll, imperceptibility, inclusion and –in the last resort– «disappearance» (as Virilio would call it) have become keywords when describing the final step of the transformation of the aesthetic: at the first step we find the material dimension of the work of art and the design object (often problematically intersecting with each other, but nevertheless difficult to distinguish, when they are involved in processes of eternalisation, which oppose the flow and aspire to musealisation); then comes their widespread explosion into the everyday in the form of finalised devices for essentially aesthetic practices; and finally their complete absorption by, and thus the disappearance in, the body of the individual. The individual who was initially the user, but now is becoming the centre itself of a transformative process into a device.

If we observe the overall effect of these transformations starting either from a discontinuistic point of view or from the hyper-aesthetic level, we might say that the new model contradicts the traditional one. But if we start from the hypo-aesthetic level we can consider the «new» forms of the aesthetic also as regards art simply more comprehensive and inclusive than the traditional art-centric conception. In the present model characterized by pervasive aesthetic practices Great Art could be considered a particular case (just as quiet is a special case of movement, and not vice versa), where e.g. author-

ship is reduced to an individual activity and the work *becomes*, or embodies itself into, a substantial object.

Thus both everyday experience and today's art appear as the broadest manifestations of the aesthetic form of life. By virtue of their relational character, they are fulfilled even without materializing in well-defined objects, since they take shape in the very performances that allow and exhaust them. In this sense, the aesthetic is foremost a *practice* that coincides with the ephemeral emergence of a pointful and expressive, and thereby meaningful aspect: as if the aesthetic form of life were at the same beginning as the ability to produce sense where sense does not yet exist or –projecting itself into the contemporary world– where sense is no longer¹.

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¹ I am grateful to Thomas Harrison and Thomas Leddy for their comments and criticisms on an earlier draft of this paper. I am deeply indebted to Gioia Laura Iannilli for her suggestions on the final version of the manuscript.

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Article rebut: 20 de gener de 2016. Article acceptat: 18 de juliol de 2016