# Comparative Everyday Aesthetics

## East-West Studies in Contemporary Living

Edited by Eva Kit Wah Man and Jeffrey Petts

Amsterdam University Press

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## Aesthetic and Ethical Practice

*Yuriko Saito*

Everyday aesthetics, one of the most recent subdisciplines of philosophical aesthetics, is often credited with opening the door to the aesthetic potential of a wide-range of different aspects of our lives. Its main contribution is generally regarded as challenging and expanding the scope of the dominant art-focused Anglo-American aesthetics of the twentieth century. It is more accurate, however, to characterize its contribution as restoring the original meaning of 'aesthetic,' focused on the sensory, and hence ubiquitous in our lives. The presumed newness of everyday aesthetics should thus be understood in its proper historical and cultural context. Aesthetic concerns with various aspects of our lives often appear in Western philosophy before everyday aesthetics; furthermore, they are prevalent in other cultural traditions.

There is no denying that everyday aesthetics helps to diversify and enrich our aesthetic life. However, I believe that an equally, or arguably more, important contribution it makes is restoring aesthetics' connection to other life concerns: practical, moral, social, political, and existential. This shift helps reclaim aesthetics' rightful place in our lives as intricately entangled with the management of everyday life. The eighteenth-century philosophers' move to carve out the distinct realm of the aesthetic by appealing to the notion of disinterestedness may have given a degree of respectability for aesthetics as an independent area of inquiry. But, at the same time, I believe that its subsequent development sometimes tended to mischaracterize the realm of aesthetics as a kind of bubble disconnected from the rest of human life concerns.

One way in which everyday aesthetics calls attention to this interconnectedness of aesthetics and other life concerns is to expose the serious social, political, and environmental ramifications of seemingly innocuous and trivial aesthetic choices and judgments we make in our daily life.

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Our judgments on the aesthetic appearance of various objects, ranging from consumer goods and farm produce to wind turbines and different landscaping practices determine what kind of goods are produced, sold, and thrown away, as well as what kind of environment is constructed and how it is maintained. Similarly, the consequences of 'lookism' are profound, leading to unjust judgments and treatments of those whose bodies do not conform to the societal aesthetic norm of normality and beauty, exacerbating racism, ablism, and ageism. In addition, those whose appearance and demeaner do not conform to societal and cultural norms of respectability are subject to moral censure, intensifying homophobia, classism, and cultural discrimination.

Furthermore, aesthetic strategies abound in the political arena. With visual images, music, typography, and clothing accessories, as well as candidates' appearance, political campaigns have become a spectacle, exemplified by the United States' presidential election. In addition, the formation of national identity and pride is inseparable from the aesthetics of what is considered a nation's cultural and natural endowments. We need only think about the wilderness aesthetics specific to the United States, Nazi Germany's promotion of its ideology through arts and nature aesthetics, and Japan's celebration of the kamikaze pilots' demise during World War II by appropriating the long-held legacy of the aesthetics of falling cherry blossoms. These historical examples show how effective aesthetic strategies are in mobilizing people's support, sometimes with dire consequences.[1]

These examples expose what I call the power of the aesthetic beyond the realm of the arts. This power wields a double-edged sword, at times providing support for human well-being and societal ideals, while at other times endangering them. Not all of us are artists or professional world-makers, such as politicians and manufacturers, but we are all implicated in collectively determining the quality of life and the state of the world through our aesthetic choices, decisions, and actions. Everyday aesthetics reminds us that we are empowered to, but also have a responsibility to, engage in this world-making project. It calls for vigilance over how and to what end we are affected by aesthetic power and finding ways to harness this power for better world-making.

The aesthetic judgements we make often involve acting on them too, such as purchasing or discarding an object, creating a garden, choosing a candidate for a job, and supporting a political cause. However, these acts

1 I discuss these examples in more details in Chapter 6 of *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and World-Making* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

are guided by the aesthetic judgements we make in the first place and the process fits rather comfortably the traditionally-favored spectator-oriented judgemental model of aesthetics. Exposing the consequences of these aesthetic judgments does not necessarily break new ground insofar as it does not illuminate the aesthetic considerations involved in the actions themselves. However, when we turn our attention to the experience of engaging in an action itself, everyday aesthetics helps us realize another important way in which our aesthetic life is intimately intertwined with the rest of our life concerns. In particular, it highlights the fundamental relationality of our existence and the ethically grounded nature of aesthetic experience. My management of everyday life is made possible by the intricate web of interdependent relationships I form with various others, and aesthetic experience makes this relationality sensible and suggests an ethical mode of living in the world with others.

Living in this world means that I am constantly interacting with others, whether humans, non-human beings, nature, environments, or artifacts. Ethics concerns the way in which I act toward others, most notably humans. A part of my ethical relationship with other humans is refraining from violating their rights by not harming them or their properties. However, in my everyday experience I often actively do things to express my concern and care for others, for example by helping a friend in need. In carrying out such an act, the ethical relationship with the other person is not satisfied merely by what the action accomplishes. That is, if my action is not motivated by care and concern for her but simply follows a deontological commitment or a utilitarian calculation, it does not lead to a fulfilling human relationship, although it may be better than not carrying out the action. Specifically, in my caring relationship with a friend, I respect her singularity and the situation she is in, activate my imagination to experience the world and the specific situation from her perspective, improvise and create a course of action, and perform it in an aesthetically sensitive manner. I invest my whole being in interacting with her in this specific situation.

The process leading to the specific act of care here parallels an aesthetic experience of an object: focusing on the specific object with an open mind, letting it invite me to its world, and experiencing it with an activated imagination. Because of this parallel between the ethical relationship with the other person and aesthetic experience, aesthetic experience could be characterized as providing a model for developing an ethical relationship with the other. At the same time, acting ethically toward others with care and respect requires an aesthetic sensibility. The ethical value of my act toward the other very much depends upon the way in which I carry out

my act – grudgingly, spitefully, indifferently, kindly, gently, or caringly – in addition to what the action accomplishes. This is an aesthetic matter because the character of my act is determined by the way in which I carry myself through body movement and speech delivery. So, this is one way in which aesthetics is inseparable from cultivating an ethical mode of living in this world with others.[2]

We can learn how aesthetics can be a means of moral education from those cultural traditions in which the aesthetic and the ethical concerns are integrated. Let me consider examples from the Japanese tradition. The long legacy of Japanese aesthetics primarily consists of master artists describing their art-making practice as a means of self-discipline and moral development. In their teachings, there is no distinction between the aesthetic dimension of their lives and the ethical mode of living in the world. Robert E. Carter characterizes this interdependence as a cultivation of the ethical mode of being in the world by working respectfully, tenderly, gently, humbly, and care-fully, *with* the materials, whether they be rocks, flowers, or clay.[3] The artistic creativity consists of how well the artist listens to and collaborates with the material, instead of exercising an independent agency for an ex-nihilo creation. It calls for attentiveness, respect, humility, responsiveness, and a spirit of collaboration, all ethical attributes. Through artistic practice, one is expected to cultivate an appreciation of the interconnected nature of one's existence and an ethical mode of relating to others.

While the reference to the Japanese art-making practice I am making here regards the artists' interactions with their materials, mostly from nature, I believe it suggests a wider application extending beyond artmaking and this particular cultural border. In our everyday life, we are constantly interacting with objects, such as implements of daily use, clothing, furniture, built environment, to name only a few. Some of them garner special attention and treatment because they are family heirlooms, mementos of a memorable occasion, or built structures of historical significance. However, most other objects remain invisible and taken for granted, unless, as Heidegger points out, their "ready-to-hand" (*zuhanden*) nature gets disrupted from malfunctioning or breakage and they assert their existence as "present-at-hand" (*vorhanden*).[4] Because of this invisibility, coupled with the low ontological status accorded to them within the Western philosophical framework, these

2 I discuss the parallel and connectedness between care ethics and aesthetic experience in *Aesthetics of Care: Practice in Everyday Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

3 Robert E. Carter, *The Japanese Arts and Self-Discipline* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).

4 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 96.

objects are quintessential "It" in Martin Buber's formulation.[5] According to this way of thinking, we don't have any ethical obligations *to* them, although we may have obligations *regarding* them in order to avoid harm to other humans and nature. There is nothing wrong with treating them merely as means to our ends, unlike in the case of humans, according to the second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative, or non-human creatures, according to animal rights advocates, or nature in general, according to some environmental ethicists. However, particularly in light of today's consumerism and its accompanying throw-away culture, this relationship with objects needs to be questioned. I suggest that we need to acknowledge our interdependent relationship with the artifactual world and reconceptualize our interactions as ethically grounded and aesthetically guided.

Here, again, we can find inspirations from Japanese culture.[6] Japan has a long tradition of honoring artifacts such as knives, needles, and dolls and expressing respect and gratitude toward them when retiring them, by giving them to temples or shrines for their proper service and disposal (*kuyō* 供養) instead of throwing them in the trash. Today, seal stamps (*hanko* or *inkan* 印鑑) used for certifying official documents in Japan have joined this set of honored artifacts, as Japan moves toward digitization. Such practices are supported by the long legacy of its indigenous religion of Shintoism, which accords a spirit to various things, and Buddhism imported from the Asian Continent, which regards everything to be imbued with its own Buddha nature.

Having been heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism, Sōetsu Yanagi (柳宗悦 1889-1961), a Japanese art historian and the founder of the Mingei (民芸 folk art) movement, characterizes innocuous and humble everyday objects made by unknown craftsmen as having a heart:

> But to think of them as nothing but physical objects would be an error. They may simply be things, but who can say that they don't have a heart? Forbearance, wholesomeness, and sincerity – aren't these virtues witnesses to the fact that everyday objects have a heart?[7]

5 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

6 By repeatedly referencing the Japanese tradition, I by no means idealize it or imply that everyone in Japan today adheres to these ideals and practices. I am offering different points of view and practices not only to non-Japanese readers who may not be familiar with them but also to Japanese readers as well to encourage reflections on the cultural legacy that they not be aware of or practice.

7 Soetsu Yanagi, *The Beauty of Everyday Things*, tr. Michael Brase (New York: Penguin Classics, 2018), 35.

He describes their way of being in the world with us as "loyal companions" and "faithful friends" who "work thoughtlessly and unselfishly, carrying out effortlessly and inconspicuously whatever duty comes their way."[8] Their presence and the usefulness offer "an expression of humility."

So as not to exoticize or orientalize such a view, consider Heidegger's discussion of 'things.' While the existence of a jug is made possible by human making, he claims that "the jug's thingness resides in its being *qua* vessel" and "the vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds."[9] Because of its void, the jug can take in and retain what is poured into it. When pouring out, the jug gives a gift of whatever is poured out.

> The holding of the vessel occurs in the giving of the outpouring. Holding needs the void as that which holds. The nature of the holding void is gathered in the giving. But giving is richer than a mere pouring out. … The jug's jug-character consists in the poured gift of the pouring out. Even the empty jug retains its nature by virtue of the poured gift …[10]

Strictly speaking, the jug itself is an inert object, and it is we humans who do the pouring in and pouring out. However, he attributes the identity of this object to these acts; furthermore, he characterizes this feature of the jug as giving gift rather than a mechanical action of pouring out. Somewhat echoing Yanagi, he characterizes the jug's mode of being as "modestly" and "inconspicuously compliant."[11]

For my purpose here, it is more helpful to interpret this attitude toward artifacts as our ethical relationship with them, rather than be concerned

8 Yanagi, *The Beauty*, 36. The next passage is from 37.

9 Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 169.

10 Heidegger, "The Thing," 172.

11 Heidegger, "The Thing," 182. We should note Heidegger's acknowledgement of affinity with East Asian philosophy. Reinhard May compiles many records of conversations Heidegger held with visitors that indicate he found in Daoism and Zen Buddhism a kindred spirit. For example, regarding the Buddhist notion of nothingness, Heidegger stated that "that is what I have been saying my whole life long." After reading a book on Zen Buddhism by D. T. Suzuki, Heidegger is said to have stated: "If I understand this man correctly, this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings." Both passages are from p. 3 of Reinhard May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influence on His Work*, tr. Graham Parkes (New York: Routledge, 1996). Yanagi also includes a similar saying by Heidegger: "If I had come into contact with the works of Daisetsu Suzuki on Zen at an earlier date, I could have reached my present conclusions much sooner" (*The Beauty*, 144).

with their ontological and moral status. Irrespective of whether these objects possess something like a spirit or moral agency worthy of our ethical handling, interacting with them with respect defines the way in which we conduct ourselves in this world.

When experiencing the artifacts of daily use as loyal companions or faithful friends giving us gifts, however inconspicuously, humbly, and modestly, we appreciate their existence beyond the service offered by them, and we use them and interact with them with respect and care. Part of such a respectful relationship is to experience them for what they are, even if they display what is normally considered to be aesthetic defects: signs of wear and tear, their own ageing, and damage, the inevitable fate of all material things. If we encourage re-examining ageism as one kind of problematic lookism, we try to cultivate an aesthetic appreciation of the deep wrinkles and weather-beaten skin of an old farmer, different from the appreciation directed toward the smooth skin of a youth. Similarly, respecting the aged appearance of an object also calls for an aesthetic sensibility that differs from a more common sensibility of favoring the perfect, mint condition of a new object, the sensibility encouraged by what Steven Jackson calls a "productionist bias" or "production-centered ethos."[12] It is a powerful aesthetic scheme created by today's industrial system that puts premium on the 'original' state of a manufactured object at the end of the production process when the product is in 'mint' condition. This ethos sheds a negative light on the subsequent transformation an object goes through, with its own aging process, repeated use, and outdated appearance.

However, such a well-worn appearance of the objects of daily use represents our history together. They have served us well, have been faithful companions who shared their lives with us, and we have grown (old) together. Rather than dismissing this kind of sentiment as a quaint form of anthropomorphism or a romantic fetish, I believe we should take it seriously as a way of acknowledging the relationality between us and the objects from our daily life. They help us function and manage being-in-the-world. Just as we love a person as a whole being, warts and all, we embrace the objects in their particular state, including what is usually considered as imperfection and defects. We continue the object's history through its own aging process and our interaction with it, each stage exhibiting a unique characteristic rather than compromising or damaging the original integrity of the object.

12 Steven Jackson, "Rethinking Repair," in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, eds. Tarleton Gillespie, et al (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014).

It is no longer an anonymous other simply serving my needs but something that grows together with me and shares a life and history with me.

In this context, it is noteworthy that Naoto Fukasawa, one of the leading designers in contemporary Japan, characterizes his design philosophy called "Super Normal" as facilitating the longevity of the object as the user lives with it through repeated use: "Super Normal's about how things work in relation to our living with them. Not just in one-off use but interactively over the long term, in relation to everything else we own and use and the atmospheric influence all these things have on our lives."[13] Through repeated use, the object in one sense becomes imperfect by showing wear and tear, *shutaku* (手沢), but looked at from another point of view, it shows "the deepening of a relationship" with the user, which he identifies as *wabi-sabi*.[14] He summarizes this relationship as follows: "We come to appreciate an object through using it, and the more we use a good object, the more we are able to appreciate its qualities, and we may discover its beauty not just in how it ages but in *how we age with it*."[15]

This ongoing entanglement with the material world as a basis for an ethical relationship with it suggests that its temporal dimension is both backward-looking and forward-looking. That is, my relationship with an object is situated both in its past and ongoing story. I may not have shared its history because I did not take part in its making or I have not lived with it in the past, although I can take part in its past through imaginative engagement. Now that it is in my possession, I expect to share my life with it by going through various stages of vicissitude together through use, breakage, and repair, and at some point I may delegate its future life to my family, friend, or stranger, unless I put it to rest. Thus, my relationship with this particular object is both past- and future-oriented, as well as present-engaged.

Although my interaction with objects of daily use is dominated by using them, the ethically grounded treatment of them goes beyond taking care so as not to cause wanton damage. Just as ethical dealing with other people is not limited to observing negative duties by not violating their rights, my ethical relationship with the material world extends to doing things proactively, namely performing care, maintenance, and repair. In fact, many household chores are directed toward such activities: cleaning, washing, polishing, repainting, mending, and so on. These activities garner

13 Naoto Fukasawa and Jasper Morrison, *Super Normal: Sensations of the Ordinary* (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2008), 104.

14 Fukasawa, *Super Normal*, 110 for *shutaku* and 106 for *wabi-sabi*.

15 Fukasawa, *Super Normal*, 111, emphasis added.

attention neither in aesthetics nor in popular imagination. These tasks are made invisible because their significance and value are considered to pale in comparison to more 'productive' or 'creative' work of making things, running a business, educating students, governing the nation, and the like, reminding us of Jacques Rancière's view on how the distribution of the sensible is socially and politically constructed.[16] As a result, various care work for objects and environments are performed by the marginalized population, such as immigrants, the poor, the uneducated, not to mention predominantly women. However, without their work, the society cannot function, and the presumably more important work cannot be performed. As an American artist, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, rhetorically asked in her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition "Care"*: "after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?"[17]

These activities also deserve aesthetic attention. First, besides reasons of hygiene and health, we clean things to achieve a desired appearance: dust-free, dirt-free, stain-free, and wrinkle-free. Tarnished silverware does not compromise its functionality; neither does the peeling paint of a wall or a car (at least initially). Rips and tears in clothing items rarely interfere with their wearability, as indicated by today's grunge-inspired fashion. When mending them, we can choose the traditionally favored invisible repair by making the signs of repair as inconspicuous, or ideally invisible, as possible. Or, we can choose visible repair method by highlighting, instead of concealing, the object's history, deriving inspirations from the Japanese art of *kintsugi* (金継 gold joinery) or *kintsukuroi* (金繕い gold repair). In all these cases, aesthetic judgments dictate the course of action.

Second, first-person accounts of performing these tasks reveal that there are many aesthetic considerations involved in these activities. There is a seamless back and forth between body engagement, observation, judgment, and the desired outcome. We constantly adjust the work according to how the object is responding to our activity and what method best achieves the desired outcome. We have to carefully listen to the object's dictates and negotiate with it. Despite general guidelines, there is no one-size-fits-all way of dealing with each situation and we have to improvise. It is instructive to hear the first-person accounts of those who engage in these acts, as most often they refer to the need to "listen to," "respond to," "work with," and "cooperate with"

16 See Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, tr. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).

17 Cited by Lucy Lippard, "Never Done," in *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art,* ed. Patricia C. Phillips (New York: Queens Museum, 2016), 17.

the object. This mode of doing things requires both an ethical relationship based upon respect and collaboration and an aesthetic engagement.

While we are constantly 'doing' things and interacting with the world around us in our everyday life, this action-packed dimension of our life has not garnered enough attention in aesthetics discourse. The reason for this neglect is that 'doing things' does not fit comfortably into the long-held model of aesthetic experience, which is directed toward a clearly defined or framed object experienced by a spectator, often resulting in a judgment that is accompanied by some sense of objectivity. Because activities experienced from within, rather than being observed from outside, do not fulfill these conditions, they are often considered to be outside of the aesthetic arena for lacking 'aesthetic credentials."[18] Harnessing insights gained from participatory art, somaesthetics, aesthetics of engagement, feminist aesthetics, and other cultural traditions, everyday aesthetics instead encourages moving the focus of inquiry from objects to experiences and paying attention to the first-person accounts.

Although the first-person account refers to a subjectively felt experience, we can share the other person's experience either by marshalling our past experiences of a similar kind or by participating imaginatively. It is not a private world closed to others; rather, the door is open to others to join a community marked by a sense of camaraderie, hence, enabling intersubjectivity while not guaranteeing objectivity.

Sometimes such an imaginatively shared experience can be very intense. When I encountered a clumsily mended buttonhole on an Auschwitz victim's uniform at the Jewish Heritage Museum in New York City a few years ago, the experience was visceral, and it took me a while to sort through the gush of emotions I experienced. It is true that I was a spectator of this object without directly interacting with it. However, although it was beyond my imagination to fathom the circumstances under which this mender repaired the frayed buttonhole, the common humanity I can share from this mending activity connected me to this anonymous mender. Not only did I feel a sense of camaraderie, but I was moved by the mender's desperate effort to retain the last shred of dignity and normalcy. Intersubjectivity of doing things is thus possible through activating imagination, although it is neither a means to nor results from any judgement-making. It is hard to compartmentalize this kind of experience as belonging to the ethical realm, existential realm, or aesthetic realm. I believe it is all of these. The aesthetic impact is made

18 Christopher Dowling, "The Aesthetics of Daily Life," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50.3 (2010): 225-242.

even more powerful by the clumsy appearance of the mend. If it is neatly and perfectly mended as if it was done by a sewing machine, I believe that the impact would have been very different. Its imperfect stiches express poignantly the extreme situation under which this anonymous mender had to work, and the effect is powerfully aesthetic.

Thus, our relationship and interaction with the material world should be both ethically-grounded and aesthetically-guided. Engagement with the artifactual world is particularly pressing today with rampant consumerism and our throw-away culture. Re-examining our relationship to objects is important not only for the practical purpose of mitigating these worrisome trends but more importantly and fundamentally for cultivating an ethical mode of living in the world with them. Everyday aesthetics, across different cultural traditions, shows how aesthetic experience can be a powerful instrument in helping us with this urgently important task.

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## About the Author

Born and raised in Japan, Professor **Yuriko Saito** taught philosophy at Rhode Island School of Design, US from 1981–2018. Her works in aesthetics appear in numerous academic journals and awarded anthologies. She has lectured widely in the US, as well as internationally. Her book, *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and World-Making* was awarded the outstanding monograph prize by the American Society for Aesthetics. She serves as editor of *Contemporary Aesthetics*, the first online, open-access and peer-reviewed journal in aesthetics.

# Comparative Everyday Aesthetics: An Introduction

*Jeffrey Petts and Eva Kit Wah Man*

## 1 The Everyday in Philosophical Aesthetics

In 2003, Crispin Sartwell's introduction to the aesthetics of the everyday noted "everyday aesthetics" as twofold in character: a philosophical interest in the "aesthetic experience of non-art objects and events"; and a corresponding "movement" in philosophical aesthetics concerned with distinctions between "fine and popular art" and "art and craft".[1] Also, Sartwell suggested both concerns began with one book, John Dewey's 1934 *Art as Experience*.[2]

But the history of everyday aesthetics, while immediately and intellectually indebted to Dewey, precedes him. Indeed, there's a strong case that it has always been and will remain a fundamental concern, a philosophical inquiry into how we should live, with related moral, political, and ecological connotations. So, Sartwell's double characterization needs rethinking and amending. Moreover, we contend that a comparative approach is necessary as part of that project if it is not to be restricted to western experiences and notions of living aesthetically. Only then can it be truly said to be an everyday aesthetics about everyone too. Other perspectives from outside western everyday aesthetics include, for example, Daoist ideas on the nature of aesthetic experience. Its notions of the possibilities for total experiential engagement with our everyday environment have affinities with Deweyan ideas about heightened, valuable and adaptive aesthetic experience.[3] Where and how these everyday aesthetic experiences occur – our encounters with quotidian things, occasions, and activities – anticipates discussions

1 Crispin Sartwell, "Aesthetics of the Everyday," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 763.

2 Sartwell, 763.

3 For examples, see Jeffrey Petts, "Aesthetic Experience and the Revelation of Value," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 1 (2000): 61–71, https://doi.org/10.2307/432350.

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that comprise the book. It consists of cultural perspectives from British, American, Chinese, and Japanese authors, who remind us of and examine, the pleasures and meanings found in everyday aesthetic lives.

But, before summarizing those contributions, it is useful to further introduce the landscape of everyday aesthetics in terms of its scope and aims as a movement; and to note the philosophical problems they have engendered.

### 1.1 Everyday Aesthetics' Scope: Beyond Fine Art

Sartwell states that "the realm of the aesthetic" is established by acknowledging that "there is an aesthetic dimension to a variety of experiences that are common to nearly all people but would not normally be seen as experiences of fine art".[4] He gives the supposed cross-cultural examples of "body adornment" and the "arrangement and ornamentation of [our] immediate environment to create a pleasing effect."[5] Other examples are provided: the decoration of homes, gardening, and cooking; and popular music, web design, and film. Sartwell further concludes that the facts of everyday aesthetics demonstrate "the continuity of the fine and popular arts, of art and craft, and of art and spirituality."[6] Everyday aesthetics, then, is not concerned with the making of artworks but with the "art of living".[7]

Yuriko Saito also noted that the range of objects of aesthetic experience is beyond art. Sartwell's "art of living" might suggest that everyday aesthetics is an *extension* of art experiences to other objects. But, Saito also challenges the nature of that experience itself and the consequent "special experienced-based aesthetics."[8] She argues that everyday aesthetics, in addition to broadening the scope of things of aesthetic experience, represents a range of moments that do not especially stand out. So, many everyday *moments* thought outside the scope of aesthetics should be understood as aesthetic. Saito gives the example of something that is experienced as unpleasant, perhaps untidy, that generates an automatic aesthetic response that then prompts an action to tidy up. The fundamental idea of "special"

4 Sartwell, "Aesthetics of the Everyday," 763.

5 Sartwell, 763.

6 Sartwell, 764.

7 Sartwell, 764.

8 Satio takes Edward Bullough's "disinterest" and John Dewey's 'engagement' accounts of aesthetic experience as representative of versions of it being necessarily "special."Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43.

associated with aesthetic experience falsely neglects, for Saito, the everyday mundane experience of the kind that, for example, prompts tidying.

Similarly, Sherri Irvin challenged not only the focus on artworks of traditional western aesthetics but ideas about aesthetic experience itself when she proposed that "experiences of everyday life are replete with aesthetic character".[9] Like Saito, Irvin rejected the idea that everyday aesthetic experience was "special" in the way characterized by Deweyan accounts. Instead, "everyday experiences are simple, lacking in unity or closure, and characterized by limited or fragmented awareness," yet this "does not disqualify them from aesthetic consideration."[10] They are the experiences one has in the room one is in, right now, from the window perhaps, able to "watch the ducks that are swimming around"; or go outside, walk down the dirt road "and study the various colors of the dirt and the tire tracks."[11]

Roger Scruton should also be mentioned to highlight the significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics.* Scruton observes that it contains valuable hints towards an aesthetics of everyday life, something that he noted too as neglected by western philosophical aesthetics: Wittgenstein records all those everyday actions motivated by a "desire for things to look right," which indicates an aesthetic interest in things.[12]

Robert Stecker was also notable for defending, alongside Sartwell, Saito, and Irvin, a broad view of the scope of aesthetic objects. He asks: "What possesses aesthetic value?" According to a general view, it can be found almost anywhere. According to a narrower view, it is found primarily in art. It is applied to other items by sharing some of the properties that make artworks aesthetically valuable."[13] Their accounts all raise initial issues about whether any object or situation is capable of aesthetic experience. About whether aesthetic experience is in fact a divided notion between art and the everyday. And about the relation of everyday aesthetic experience to aesthetic value.

9 Sherri Irvin, "The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48, no. 1 (2008): 29, https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/aym039.

10 Irvin, 29.

11 Irvin, 30.

12 Roger Scruton, "In Search of the Aesthetic," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 47, no. 3 (2007): 240, https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/aym004.

13 Robert Stecker, "Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Value," *Philosophy Compass* 1 (2006): 1–10; Stecker has expanded the idea in *Intersections of Value: Art, Nature and the Everyday* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

## 1.2 Everyday Aesthetics: Key Debates and Controversies

The most fundamental doubt about everyday aesthetics is its reality. So, while experiencing artworks is rare, it might also be the case that aesthetic experience is not a quotidian feature of many lives, lives that are evidently and essentially non-aesthetic. Lives of poverty and squalor, for example, seem fundamentally so, without any possibility of some aesthetic compensation. And similarly, lives dominated by over-consumption of poor quality and unnecessary things. This overarching doubt breaks down into issues about the possible triviality of everyday aesthetic experience, the coherence of the idea of the aesthetic, and about aesthetic value. What is an aesthetic experience of the everyday? Does an explanation cohere with the aesthetic experiences of artworks? What value is attached to aesthetic experiences of the everyday?

Two recent debates are illustrative of how aestheticians have engaged these fundamental questions. The debate between Sherri Irvin and David Davies is illustrative of how broad agreement about the existence of aesthetic lives beyond appreciating artworks still leaves significant room for disagreement. In this case, the dispute centers on what makes an individual experience aesthetic and justifies the claims for the value of everyday aesthetic experience generally. A second debate, between Christopher Dowling and Kevin Melchionne, is similar in agreeing on the existence of everyday aesthetics but disputing what makes an experience aesthetically valuable and whether art-like experience is still the paradigm case of aesthetic experience.

Davies disputes Irvin's rejection of everyday aesthetics' Deweyan heritage.[14] Irvin rejects the Deweyan heritage that requires aesthetic experience to have "unity" and "closure." And that this involves some active and critical encounter with the things being aesthetically appreciated. This puzzles Davies because he wonders how there can be any value in such personal verdicts in the sensory pleasures described by Irvin. In turn, how then, without the cognitive and the evaluative elements of aesthetic experience, can Irvin's claims of the moral and environmental significance of everyday aesthetic experiences be justified? Davies looks to the philosophical aesthetics of Frank Sibley for support, but the argument is essentially that there is a necessary cognitive element in aesthetic experience or, in other words, a requirement that "critical" reasons for liking are part of the experience. An object of everyday interest must be sufficiently rich to warrant a description

14 David Davies, "Sibley and the Limits of Everyday Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 49, no. 3 (2015): 50–65.

that enters a critical debate about aesthetic value. The cognitive character of aesthetic experience (everyday or art) is twofold: I describe; you can then debate my evaluation. Irvin indeed removes this element of a Deweyan explanation of aesthetic experience. Davies concludes that Irvin's account leaves no way to distinguish aesthetic from non-aesthetic experience. But he still supports the idea of everyday aesthetics because, with any evaluative model, we can return to the everyday and still find everyday aesthetic experiences worth the name.

Dowling, like Davies, is skeptical about the aesthetic credentials of uncritical, sensory, everyday experience.[15] Still, again, like Davies, he supports the general thesis of everyday aesthetics that aesthetic experience goes beyond that of artworks. Responding, Melchionne offers a defense of Irvin's examples of her supposed everyday aesthetic experiences by suggesting that, even if personal, they represent a pattern of aesthetic living. Dowling then agrees that aesthetic experience extends beyond artworks, but its core is "the normative aspect that renders certain judgments of particular interest to others."[16] Aesthetic experience has an essential axiological dimension, in other words. So, "there are good reasons not to overlook the distinction between merely idiosyncratic and a-critical responses and those that are putatively the subject of agreement, amendment, and critical discussion."[17] Trivial experience is non-social, non-critical: "the kind of judgments that most of us are not required to engage with, falling to elicit the possibility of corrigibility, consensus, or criticism."[18] Melchionne's response to Dowling argues for a view of everyday aesthetic experience where critical discourse is limited. While conceding that individual experiences may not have aesthetic value in themselves, they represent aesthetic patterns of the everyday. So, referencing Irvin's account of her own aesthetic experience in her study, the comfort of a breeze, and so on, while these might seem trivial, they are "part of an extended ritual of study and reflection that the writer has honed" and show how "ordinary experiences typically derive significance from their role in a pattern of daily life."[19] It is perhaps moot whether this satisfies Davies's point that such experience can hardly support the greater claims of the everyday aesthetics movement. Certainly, if everyday aesthetic

15 Christopher Dowling, "The Aesthetics of Daily Life," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 3 (2010): 225–42, https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayq021.

16 Dowling, 240.

17 Dowling, 240.

18 Dowling, 240.

19 Kevin Melchionne, "Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life: A Reply to Dowling," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 51, no. 4 (2011): 439, https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayr034.

experience is not for its own sake but is also world-making, its critical and normative character would seem necessary.

## 2 Comparative Contributions to Everyday Aesthetics

*Comparative Everyday Aesthetics* is structured into six parts. The categorization is not prescriptive but indicative of critical areas of human life that are of interest to everyday aesthetics.[20]

In Part 1, *Living Aesthetically*, Robin Wang, Thomas Leddy, and Ouyang Xiao each argue their ideas of what it is to live aesthetically, especially from Daoist and Neo-Confucian perspectives. Robin Wang's "Dao Aesthetics: Ways of Opening to Sublime Experiences and Transforming Beautifully" presents three specific Daoist approaches to aesthetic experience. These are *tidao* 體道 (embodiment of Dao), *hedao* 合道 (alignment with Dao), and *dedao* 得道 (obtaining Dao). Wang illustrates *tidao* by introducing the Daoist Academy in Nanyue 南岳 (Southern Mountain) in China's Hunan Province. Living in the mountain, Dao followers appreciate the realm of the Dao via the beauty of nature and through artistic practices. To align with Dao, *hedao* is achieved through day-to-day habitual living and regimented physical exercise and breathing to attain a calm inner life filled with aesthetic appreciation and delights. The habitual way of daily routine is essential to health, and Wang lists the movement of *qi* flow in one's body in a day. She introduces *qi's* circulation, preservation, and nurturing, which should echo the Dao's transformation into an earthly bodily regiment. Through these physical nurturing and correspondence acts, life becomes meaningful and beautiful. The breathing exercise should go along with body movements, during which one should let go of thoughts, emotions, and desires. Wang mentions *Damei* 大美, which refers to the beauty of the Dao and the beauty of living in the world.

In "Everyday Aesthetics of Taking a Walk – with Zhuangzi," Thomas Leddy similarly reminds us of the beauty of strolling in everyday life, a time we feel free of mental intensity but still are immediately sharpened in our observations and sensitive to daily happenings. Things are perceived in tranquility and silence, akin to that experienced in meditation. This experience reveals a truth about reality that is usually "distorted" when one articulates or describes its perception in words and language. Leddy

20 Other divisions are possible, of course, around particular issues and approaches, for example. This is more akin to how the philosophy of art can be divided between different art forms.

relates walking with environmental aesthetics and emphasizes the totality and the continuity of the experience that one "grasps" during a daily stroll. He adopts the term "micro-aesthetics" for this and describes the perception of all the familiars in a walk as a form of consolation and reminds us of the possible meeting of the "extraordinary" of things during the stroll which is waiting for our discovery. Leddy reviews Gumbrecht's appropriation of Heidegger's idea of "presence," which leads to meeting the unconcealment of the truths of things. He also relates unconcealment to Daoist Zhuangzi's moment of "grasping" by the subject, a natural tendency, and an interaction between the subject and nature. This happens in the best state when the subject enjoys walking in everyday life, which refers to one's experience in the realm of the "Dao." The reading of both Wang and Leddy echoes the Daoist idea that human experiences transcend a subject and object dichotomy when the mind enters the realm of the Dao and is engaged with Nature. Here nature fills the human mind and enables things to present themselves under the "light" of the mind, which is "coping" with things in the Daoist sense. It is said that once the human mind is clear from desires, it will act as a mirror to the objects that present the in-itself to it. All the judgments that come after, including moral and aesthetic, are conducted in terms of the subject's temperaments, which may have developed from one's personal history, experience, and preferences, leading to one's values and tastes. From a comparative point of view, one can detect in Daoist thinking the idea of the harmonious state of aesthetic experience.

Ouyang Xiao's "Investigation of Things: Reflecting on Chinese-Western Comparative Everyday Aesthetics" notes that trans-cultural comparative studies entail harvesting new and enlightening perspectives of our aesthetic life and reflecting on our cultural traditions. He suggests that in the Neo-Confucian practice of *gewu* or investigating things, there is a Chinese inspiration for dealing with the familiar, ordinary, and routine aesthetically. It can lead to an immersive aesthetical experience characterized by a sensuous and intuitive recognition of the appropriateness of everyday things dwelling in their contexts and a cosmic understanding of the generative power of the universe that is both profound and poetic. By contemplating aesthetic experience facilitated by *gewu*, Ouyang argues that aesthetic experience is typically not individual per se but collective because many prima facie private and personal aesthetic experiences are possible only because of the collective underneath. So, for Ouyang, an irreplaceable value of everyday aesthetics lies in revealing what is often hidden by the dominant theories of aesthetic experience. Therefore, aesthetic experience is typically not individual but collective because

many prima facie private and personal aesthetic experiences are possible only because of the collective underlying them. Ouyang states, "a person of taste is never alone." Everyday aesthetics thus urges us to recognize the fact of associated living.

In Part 2, *Nature and Environment*, Gao Jianping and Emily Brady consider everyday aesthetics about nature and environmental concerns. Gao Jianping, "The Aesthetics of Nature and the Environment: From the Perspective of Comparison between China and the West," notes that the study of environmental and ecological aesthetics in China only began in the twenty-first century. This may depend on the meaning of ecological perspectives. Still, environmental aesthetics should have been discussed in commenting on the design of Chinese gardens and the practice of ancient Chinese landscape paintings. The aestheticians of the peasant country naturally have had various appreciative discussions on the beauty of Nature throughout the history of China. When comparing Nature's aesthetics discourses in China and Europe, Gao lists Western discourses on the beauty of creation, the sublime, and the picturesque. Chinese discourses on the beauty of nature have undergone very discursive developments, leading to a transformation of the discipline of aesthetics in Marxist China. From the appreciation of the beauty of Nature in ancient times to contemporary ecological and environmental aesthetics, Gao suggests that discourses in both cultures demonstrate similarities and differences, including the appreciation of our natural environments in everyday life.

In "Cryosphere Aesthetics," Emily Brady argues that as we witness change and loss to the cryosphere, environmental aesthetics has an essential place in illuminating and disclosing the qualities, meanings, and values of ice and snow and the relationships between people and ecologies in the cryosphere. She formulates an environmental aesthetics of the cryosphere through the "integrated aesthetic" theory, which draws upon theoretical and other methods of aesthetics and seeks to incorporate a plurality of knowledge, narratives, and global perspectives. Brady adds to this the relevance of cultivating appreciative virtues such as wonder, receptivity, sensitivity, and humility. Her argument for descriptive aesthetics proposes the inclusion of various sources and collaboration between disciplines, researchers, community-based researchers, and narrative-based policy development. Brady notes that such collaborations are underway, for example, through the endeavors of art-sci projects and the emerging cross-disciplinary areas of the arctic and polar humanities. With this toolkit of integrated resources, Brady hopes that a better understanding of the role of aesthetics in the lived experience of the cryosphere will be possible.

In Part 3, *Eating and Drinking*, Carolyn Korsmeyer, Richard Shusterman, and Gao Yanping examine perhaps the most fundamental aspect of everyday aesthetics, eating and drinking, both as a personal and social experience. Carolyn Korsmeyer's "Memory's Kitchen: In Search of a Taste" brings us back to our childhood with its physical and sensational memories. She tells the story of her baking of *kuchen*, a kind of German sweet cake that her grandmother used to make, and the countless times she has failed in producing the right yeasty delight. She starts from a note suggested by Yuriko Saito that everyday aesthetics is action-oriented, and the act of family baking is about memories: the right color, the right feeling of the dough and the right scent, etc.; getting these right leads one back to one's personal experiential history. Together with these sense memories are those of the kitchen and the home setting and the dear ones who had brought her sensational pleasure and anticipation. She further elaborates that the food experience is of a particular culture at a specific time, and the search for a taste is also an activity for identity searching. Korsmeyer produces a touching piece that is both personal and reflective, thinking of the interesting dialectic between memories of a taste to human imagination. All touch on the aesthetics of everyday baking, which combines one's sense of memories, emotional adventure, and how one is afraid of losing them.

In "Chopsticks and the Haptic Aesthetics of Eating," Richard Shusterman firstly points out the superior mind and the ignorable body division in Western philosophy since ancient Greece and contained in the Kantian notion of "disinterestedness." Shusterman has written and published widely promoting somaesthetics, and this philosophy is demonstrated in his observation of the aesthetics of using chopsticks. His discussion covers "the art of cuisine" and highlights food's social meanings and the manners of food ingestion as a form of social performance in everyday life. One can see how enjoyable it is to feel the palpable pleasure of using chopsticks as an eating utensil, especially when eating noodles under certain cultural habits. He elaborates on his research of chopsticks' histories and cultures in Japan and China and points out its efficiency in consumption and the social readings of chopsticks using postures. He concludes that the developing contexts of everyday life shape the frameworks of our daily eating habits.

Gao Yanping, "Taking Tea but Differently: The Chinese Tea Tradition and its European Transformations," investigates tea drinking as part of the everyday culinary aesthetics of China and Europe, which adopted Chinese tea drinking and tea equipage in the seventeenth century. She explains how Europe adopted and adapted Chinese tea equipment and the reasons behind those transformations, focusing on English tea drinking and

equipment in the eighteenth century. European knowledge of tea came only at the end of the Ming dynasty, and what they adopted was essentially the tea style (*cha dao* or "way of tea") of the Ming. Gao Yanping argues that whether a culture can successfully absorb alien elements from another culture into its own depends on how its spirit and contextual conditions can cultivate and transform the cultural imports. Initially, the most obvious (material or formal) elements are taken or imitated. Later, however, the imports are somehow changed by the absorbing culture and adapted to their tradition and way of life, thus creating new forms with their style and aesthetics. With imports relating to daily life, this transcultural adaption happens more quickly. Daily life involves practical adaptation pressures and the repetition of daily habits and functional activities. Drinking, along with eating, is an important daily activity with crucial practical importance, even for our somatic survival, and has rich aesthetic potential. In the traditional Chinese aesthetic way, taking tea was never merely a way of quenching thirst or a medium for socializing; it was also a performative reenactment of the intimate and essential transaction between human cultural and natural powers. In this drama performed on the Chinese tea table as a stage, the tea was the hero – a material yet transcendent, transformative element (like an alchemic elixir). At the same time, porcelain, stoneware, and other tea equipment were the supporting cast in unfolding the powers of the tea. By participating in this drama, serious Chinese tea drinkers still find themselves transformed physically and metaphysically from the taking of tea. Tea equipage is an interesting site for everyday aesthetics because it combines the need for practical everyday functionality with aesthetic appreciation.

In Part 4, *Creative Life*, Tanehisa Otabe and Jeffrey Petts consider everyday aesthetics in our creative work. Tanehisa Otabe notes that art practice in Japan is closely intertwined with everyday life. The "tea ceremony" (in modern Japanese: *cha-dô*, literally the "way of tea") might serve as a typical example. His article focuses on the theory of the Japanese tea ceremony by Kakuzô Okakura (1862–1913) and Yoshinori Ônishi (1888–1959). It explores how and why everyday life became the main topic of modern Japanese aesthetics based on three main characteristics. First, the tea ceremony is an aestheticization of the ordinary action of drinking tea, which testifies that beauty consists of treating the smallest incidents of life aesthetically. Second, the tea ceremony is held among a certain number of persons (namely a host and guests) in a teahouse specially designed for the ceremony and is thus interactive among participants and focuses on creating a space of conviviality. Third, the focus of the tea ceremony is not the work of art as a result but rather the process of performance and steady training in both

mental and physical sense. He argues that these characteristics of art practice in Japan are based on the Japanese understanding of the "*dô*" (in Chinese: *dào*) and that creativity is not attributed to "original" individuals, as in the West, but rather to the dô. The idea of "the aesthetic life [*biteki seikatsu*]" – a term coined by Chogû Takayama (1871–1902) in 1901 – may be considered the leitmotiv of modern aesthetics in Japan and marked the Japanization of modern Western aesthetics. In Otabe's view, a traditional Japanese view of art in the sense of *gei-dô* (literally "the way of art") underlies this idea of aesthetic life. The question then arises of how cha-dô, which is thus rooted in life, could be regarded as a form of art in modern Japan. A clue to answering this question can be found in Okakura's *The Book of Tea*. Okakura defines Teaism as a "religion of the art of life." In Teaism, people consciously practice the art of life, thus aiming for higher ideals. This does not imply that the content or target of the training of each art is helpful for our life. Instead, the individual's mental and physical disposition for a particular training forms a nucleus of their life because life consists of steady mental and physical training. This is precisely captured by the Japanese proverb, "Being a master in one art makes you versatile." In short, it is by theoretically reflecting the long-time traditional gei-dô that modern Japanese aesthetics has focused on everyday life.

Jeffrey Petts's "Skill stories from the Zhuangzi and Arts and Crafts: Aesthetic Fit, Harmony, and Transformation: Toward a Developmental, Comparative Everyday Aesthetics" examines skillful work related to aesthetic interest. The stories of the cook, the woodcarver, and the wheelwright, among others in Zhuangzi's work, have been explained as stories of craftsmanship, describing displays of skill and awe-inspiring outcomes. Petts examines descriptions of skill stories from the Zhuangzi – about craftsmanship, spontaneity, and successful outcomes – in a Western and Chinese philosophical, aesthetic light. That is, in terms of aesthetic concepts like "fit" and "harmony" that occur in the skill stories, with the transformational value of aesthetic experience in mind. This free, skillful work – which Petts thinks is usefully seen as the workmanship of risk rather than a mere knack – hardly amounts to "mindless activity": there is a process of becoming skilled and skilled work is open to appraisal. He lays down some markers and suggested possible grounds for understanding skill stories in terms that foster global, developmental aesthetic understanding and education. Petts notes that there is often skepticism about genuine East-West dialogue, that it must necessarily flounder with the problems of translation. But he suggests that if translation poses predicaments, it also offers opportunities for the creative, collaborative reconstruction of ideas: for transformations

that are also transfiguring. He argues that skill stories from the Zhuangzi and arts and crafts tend to a global concept of developmental aesthetics: an everyday philosophical aesthetics that embraces individual cultivation and social progress while maintaining different cultural traditions of beauty and creative making.

In Part 5, *Technology and Images*, Janet McCracken, Peng Feng, and John Carvalho consider the ubiquity of images in the modern everyday world. Janet McCracken's "Why We Love Our Phones: A Case Study in the Aesthetics of Gadgets" reflects on the experience of using a cell phone to make broader claims about our relationship to gadgets in general, arguing that in addition to people's ubiquitous claims about their psychological dependence on their cellphones for practical life, we love our phones for the same reason we love most things: for their beauty and our possession of them. She takes the example of the Samsung "Z fold 3" and "Z flip 3" phones, affordable, widely advertised smartphones with folding touchscreens, noting they do not add any functionality to the phone. McCracken concludes that Samsung produces the new phone, and people buy it for purely aesthetic reasons: they're *cool*, pleasant to the touch, and nostalgic because it flips. Phones are *cute*. We draw this enormity of experience out of a tiny package which makes that experience more *fun*. She relates this to our human propensity to fidget with things. McCracken also discusses how one's cell phone enables one's social existence, legal recognition as a person, a little like a birth certificate but much more like a wallet. As a wallet, one's phone is a pocket-sized device into which one places essential personal documents and puts one's trust in it. But the phone betters the wallet in the sheer number of such personal validations that we entrust to it. Feeling alienated? Refer to a thousand photographs of your ancestors. Insecure? Deposit a check in your bank account or check your credit score. Unappreciated? Buy yourself something nice online. Avoid the gaze of your interlocutor by fiddling with it; escape the boredom of the waiting room; ask it to wake you up if you nod off. One makes one's cellphone into one's constant representative, one's constant companion. Like any other gadget, but more so, it has one's back – and can betray one's trust. In that, it's quite a bit like a friend.

In "Filming the Everyday: Between Aesthetics and Politics," Peng Feng notes that photography and aesthetics of the everyday are closely related because both seem to go beyond the scope of the arts, fitting Sartwell's characterization of everyday aesthetics noted at the outset in this introduction. Photography is an art particularly suited to this everyday aesthetics, not only because photography takes everyday life as its subject but also because it challenges the distinction between the arts and popular culture.

Peng Feng has selected three Chinese artists from different periods to illustrate the changes in our conception of photography as art. And he argues that the aesthetics of everyday life is only possible when surveillance camera technology is widely used. Of course, the questions raised by the surveillance footage are not only aesthetic but also political. Xu Bing's 徐冰 (1955–) photography is different from the works of both Lang Jingshan and Wang Qingsong. Aestheticization is not so much beautification and representation of the present. Since surveillance cameras do not "pollute" both the medium and the object, we see the present in the film: the real everyday life. As Xu Bing said, "In fact, I found out later that the images grabbed by the surveillance are vivid and peculiar; they transcended our traditional understandings over photography aesthetics." The images are vivid and peculiar because we see the presence of real-life that is particular and beyond any general aesthetic rules through them. However, ontologically speaking, the images are not real life. The images made by surveillance cameras reach the "ideal" form of photography. According to Scruton, ideal photography is not an intentional but a causal process. In other words, a surveillance camera makes pure images of its subject. The pure image transforms its subject from practical to aesthetic object. We contemplate things through pure images, but we cannot live with things through images. In this sense, Peng Feng argues, surveillance cameras transform the everyday from a practical to an aesthetic realm and realize a kind of aestheticization of the everyday.

In "Images and Reality," John Carvalho notes that images cover our world and are viewed by some as a threat to the everyday reality of that world. On closer inspection, images thicken everyday reality or, on one interpretation, they animate events that pair bodies with the media where images are found. Signs and images and the evident growth patterns can be more generally described as "affordances," what an environment furnishes or provides an organism, for good or ill, to pursue its aims. As affordances, Carvalho argues, images prove to be resources that, for good or ill, advance the forms of life embodied in minds. He argues, as well, that it is up to those embodiments to form lives that pick up what is good in those affordances and cast aside what is not, including the distractions images can so often present. Education can help us form lives that more regularly turn up the good that images afford us. Still, education must be enacted in our lives and disposed of periodically to enhance the reality where we find images. Education attempts to do that by teaching how to critically engage the affordances that turn up in our world and draw from the resources for embodying lives that turn up affordances for enhancing those lives. Given the widespread, unselfconscious absorption in images that characterizes

our contemporary cultural environments, education in schools and the media has a long way to go. Our world is awash with images, but those images are not signs of the "death of reality." They are our reality, and they afford us ways of engaging the reality of flesh and blood human lives with practical, political consequences. Carvalho believes that we can choose how to engage them not as an accomplishment of our impossibly disembodied subjectivity but as our own embodied way of engaging or "gearing into" the world by making ourselves a form of life. We are afforded the possibility of enhancing that life with the images we find in our world.

In Part 6, *Relationships and Communities*, Kathleen Higgins and Eva Kit Man reflect on everyday aesthetics from that important part of our daily life. In "Aesthetics in Friendship and Intimacy," Kathleen Higgins proposes an aesthetic account of our intimate relationships, the nature of which many of us are not aware of nor mention. She refers to physical scientists' experiments on how scent or smell provokes or diminishes admiration among people at the beginning of relationships. She further suggests that each individual has a unique aesthetic biography that is always influenced by social and cultural factors. So, aesthetic tensions can ruin a relationship, such that only love and affection can make optimal and creative adjustments. Multicultural differences also shape our everyday lives and reveal varied aesthetics of dwelling, dressing, eating, and ideas of tidiness/untidiness. She suggests that clashes of taste can be managed via spatial solutions and communication, but more importantly, they can also help expand our aesthetic horizons.

In "Morality and Aesthetic Lives: Real Stories of Two Hong Kong Women," Eva Kit Wah Man links aesthetics and ethics with the stories of two Chinese women who came from Guangdong, China, to reside in colonial Hong Kong during the wars in China in the 1950s. The first story is an autobiography told by a woman who was ninety years old; the second story was told by people who adored a younger woman who died at the age of thirty-four. The story of Eight, the older lady, echoes David Carr's insights on how people narrate their own life stories as an author. This related story demonstrates the Confucian aesthetics of a woman of chastity, whose merit has made her beautiful, in that Confucian tradition, her inner moral dimensions determining her aesthetic qualities as a woman. It also demonstrates a contemporary emphasis on independence as the key to successful aging, as the life of the elderly lady is independent and self-sufficient, serene, peaceful, and graceful, all qualities related to Confucian beliefs and values. The story of the younger woman, Ling, tells the struggles of a long-term triangular relationship and how she finally lost her life to cancer. In the

narratives by other people, Ling's beauty is that she lived like a female buddha, was always kind and caring, loyal to her family, and put others' benefits and well-being first. In these stories, Man relates feminine aesthetics to cultural traditions and shows how the narrators of these stories imagined the beauty of the characters based on everyday ethical and aesthetic notions and lives.

## 3 Comparative Everyday Aesthetics: Features, Antecedents, and Aims

Some general observations about everyday aesthetics can be made in the light of the comparative essays outlined here, which engage the need to rethink Sartwell's characterization of the subject. They fall under three main headings. One: the status and characteristic features of everyday aesthetics. Two: the antecedents of everyday aesthetics. Three: the proper aims of everyday aesthetics.

The first of these is perhaps most easily noted. That is that everyday aesthetics has a confirmed set of topics from everyday life, from our natural and built environments to our relationships and communities, that warrant philosophical investigation from aesthetic perspectives. And that at the center of such work is an inquiry into the nature of these aesthetic interests and experiences worldwide. In sum, they amount to a core concern with living aesthetically, albeit with cultural variations. If everyday aesthetics coheres around the art of living for individuals, it also extends to social, political, and environmental concerns associated with enhanced and associated living.

A second general observation follows: identifying aesthetic lives at the center of everyday aesthetics opens research to a rich and varied history of philosophical interest in aesthetic lives, from Epicureanism to Aestheticism, from dandies to designers. So, for example, from ancient western philosophy, Epicureanism's concerns with "the happy life" seem worthy of investigating in terms of living aesthetically, witnessed by Epicurus' letter to Menoeceus: "we must meditate on what brings happiness, since if we have that we have everything … what follows are the first principles of the good life."[21] Late nineteenth century western Aestheticism's "cult of beauty" was partly at least an aspiration for beautiful surroundings in one's everyday life: in one's

21 Epicurus, "The Happy Life. Letter to Menoeceus," in *The Epicurean Philosophers*, ed. Gaskin John (London: Everyman, 1995), 42.

home particularly.[22] Aestheticism extended too to general ideas about the best way to live. Walter Pater's unpublished, incomplete essay "The Aesthetic Life" suggests constructing "an aesthetic formula of conduct," ethics from aesthetic sensibilities, "from an educated sense of fitness."[23] But Pater doubts that this aesthete will find "in the world now actually around us sufficient congruity, sufficient sustenance or opportunity to make the aesthetic life practicable or worthwhile"[24]. Self-conscious aesthetic life is perhaps most famously evident in J-K Huysmans's *Against Nature*, its central character Des Esseintes living only to invent aesthetic experiences.[25] We can note, too, in a related vein, Honoré de Balzac's *Treatise on Elegant Living* and the notion of the dandy as an aesthetic type.[26] We see it expressed too, more prosaically, in Georges Simenon's novel *Pedigree* in a character who "had arranged his days so that they were a harmonious succession of little joys … a cup of coffee and a slice of bread and butter, a dish of bright green peas, reading the paper beside the fire … a thousand quiet pleasures which were waiting for him at every turning of life … [and] were as necessary to him as the air he breathed."[27]

Aestheticism was not simply an artistic movement but a reaction to the ugliness of mass-produced products of the industrial age and helped spawn an interest in good everyday design that continues to this day, with designers routinely stating that their product designs have in mind not merely improved functionality but improved aesthetic lives. Influential twentieth century western designers such as Charlotte Perriand and Dieter Rams thought this, establishing aesthetically minded design principles for everyday living, utilizing the process design traditions and practices they'd seen in Japan. Relatedly, figures in arts and crafts traditions, like William Morris in England and Soetsu Yanagi in Japan, are figures who should be of interest to everyday aestheticians.[28] Similarly concerned with the

22 Stephen Calloway and Lynn Federie Orr, eds., *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860–1900* (London: V&A Publishing, 2014).

23 Denis Donoghue, *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 291.

24 Donoghue, 290.

25 One example is Des Esseintes' trip to London, which he recreates without leaving his home city of Paris, imagining the experience through a Baedeker guidebook and eating typical English food. Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

26 Honore de Balzac, *Treatise on Elegant Living*, trans. Napoleon Jeffries (Cambridge, MA: Wakefield Press, 2010).

27 See introduction of volume 1 in Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayal, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Timothy J. Tomasik (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

28 William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art; Lectures on Art and Industry*, vol. 22, Collected Work of William Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Soetsu Yanagi, *The Beauty of Everyday Things*, trans. Michael Brase (New York: Penguin Classics, 2018).

opportunities for aesthetic living in the built environment, in the twentieth century, the architectural critic Ian Nairn exposed Subtopia, a universal foreground of street furniture imposed by modern man essentially destructive of opportunities for everyday aesthetic experience.[29]

This leads to the third general observation that everyday aesthetics has broadly related socio-political and environmental aims. Sartwell's characterization, as noted above, does describe everyday aesthetics as a "movement." But that movement's aims seem more likely to be expressed, today and from a comparative approach, in moral and political tones than in terms of breaking down art versus non-art divisions. For example, Irvin has suggested that "aesthetic attention to the domain of everyday experience may provide for lives of greater satisfaction and contribute to our ability to pursue moral aims."[30] Saito argues that everyday aesthetics engages in "creating positive aesthetic effects … [including] designing objects and environments" and "respectful and caring interactions."[31] If everyday aesthetic interests and experiences are more than merely personal verdicts and reflect patterns of living, and if these patterns are more than fashion and commercially driven lifestyle choices, but are of real value, then the everyday aesthetics movement of world-making that Saito suggests is appropriately grounded in individual aesthetic lives. And it is properly established and understood alongside art in the building of cultures. As Herbert Read noted, "cultures start with small things;" with "pots and pans."[32] And with ordinary lives. This core theme of everyday aesthetics, focused on people, not artworks, and on the general value of aesthetic lives, represents a significant and lasting turn for philosophical aesthetics that necessarily has implications for the aims of everyday aesthetics.

Saito's recent reflections in *Aesthetics of the Familiar* and her Foreword to this volume confirm everyday aesthetics as a movement with a new and refreshed purpose.[33] She notes that everyday aesthetics is now galvanized as a discipline, having done the job of "*restoring* aesthetics to its original task: investigating the nature of experiences gained through sensory perception and sensibility."[34] But she suggests that with that done, broader goals of

29 Ian Nairn, *Outrage* (London: Architectural Press, 1955).

30 Irvin, "The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience," 29.

31 Yuriko Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and Worldmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). See also Saito's Foreword in this volume.

32 Herbert Read, *To Hell With Culture* (London: Kegan Paul, 1941), 47.

33 Yuriko Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and Worldmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

34 Saito, 1.

aesthetic education and world-making beckon. Saito concludes that everyday aesthetics has a vital role in "cultivating a capacity" for the aesthetic experience of the "all-too-familiar," and that amounts to education in the "art of living."[35] Herbert Read had expressed similar sentiments, suggesting that a culture focused only on artworks should "go to hell!" After Read, everyday aesthetics have the task "to introduce values and motives into the daily life and activities of ordinary people, values and motives that will serve as a necessary stimulus to their spiritual development."[36]

Introducing his memoirs, the aesthete Harold Acton observed: "Over two thousand years ago Confucius talked of *T'ien hsia wei kung*, 'the Universe for everybody'; such aspiration will only be realized by North, South, East, and West speaking mind to mind and body to body, a mutual exchange of ideas between the nations – ideas without national boundaries. Peace on earth and goodwill toward men … Yet as I look around me, I can see … Politicians everywhere, booming and thumping! All the more reason for me to raise my gentle voice."[37] And for the gentle and purposeful voices of everyday aesthetics – practical, theoretic, and educative – around the world to raise theirs. We hope this collection contributes to that noble aim, the importance of living.[38]

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35 Saito, 225.

36 Herbert Read, *The Redemption of the Robot* (New York: Trident Press, 1966), 170.

37 Harold Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 2.

38 We allude to Yutang Lin, The *Importance of Living* (New York: The John Day Company, 1937); and Herbert Read, *Poetry and Anarchism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938).

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