

The Promise, the Challenge, of Everyday Aesthetics

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The contemporary movement of Everyday Aesthetics shows great promise for expanding the focus of the discipline from its historical preoccupations with fine art and natural beauty to include objects and activities that it has heretofore neglected: sofas, knives and coffee-pots on the one hand, and cooking, walking to work or going to a ballgame on the other. My work on the aesthetics of design offers a modest contribution to this expanded scope of concern. But expanding the range of objects and activities fit for aesthetic attention brings with it the question of how exactly these phenomena should be treated: one of the biggest challenges the new movement faces is to conceptualize how we respond aesthetically to ordinary things.

On the one hand, when we appreciate a sofa or ballgame – when we subject it to our theoretical gaze – we also seem to lift it from the realm of the ordinary and everyday to that of the unusual or striking. That is, to make such a thing fit for our aesthetic attention is at the same time to make it somehow extraordinary, and this seems to rob it of the very everydayness that the movement has been striving to focus on. On the other hand, if we emphasize the mundane and ordinary nature of daily phenomena, it becomes difficult to explain why they would capture our aesthetic attention at all.

Recent contributions to the literature on Everyday Aesthetics are roughly divided by how theorists have responded to this challenge. For example, what Chris Dowling has called the “weak formulation” of Everyday Aesthetics claims that «the concept of the aesthetic at work in discussions of the value of art can be *extended to include* experiences from daily life» (Dowling [2010]: 241). Dowling cites Roger Scruton and Sherri Irvin as also defending this view, but its most recent proponent is Tom Leddy, who in his 2012 work *The Extraordi-*

nary in the Ordinary claims that it is not possible to «approach the ordinariness of the ordinary without making it extraordinary, without approaching it, therefore, in an art-like way» (Leddy [2012]: 121). By contrast, the “strong formulation” holds that «experiences from daily life can afford *paradigm* instances of aesthetic experience. Such experiences are not bound by the limitations and conventions that temper discussions of aesthetic value in the philosophy of art» (Dowling [2010]:241). The strong view can be identified with Yuriko Saito and Arto Haapala in particular.

What emerges in the distinction between the weak and strong views is a disagreement about the appropriate methodology for the movement, and as such it represents a pressing issue. Either *Everyday Aesthetics* merely extends the range of objects fit for aesthetic attention while maintaining familiar theoretical models and concepts, *or* the movement demands a reconfiguration of our understanding of aesthetic experience as prompted by quotidian phenomena. In this paper I will consider both attempts to respond to the challenge that the everyday poses and find both inadequate as they are currently presented. I will suggest that the aesthetic experience of design as I have conceived it may provide a direction for a more fully conceptualized theory of the aesthetics of the everyday. But let me begin with the critique.

1. *The Weak Formulation*

The weak view can be superficially characterized as the uncritical application of already established aesthetic theory to a variety of new objects and as simply bickering about which ones to include in the category of the aesthetic: itches and scratches (cfr. Irvin [2008]); the tucking in of a shirt or the art of wardrobe more generally (cfr. Melchionne [2011]); standard concepts such as beauty and gracefulness or their extension to include “nice” “shiny” and “fun”(cfr. Leddy [2012]). However, this characterization belies a methodological position that is both more complex and more problematic for it takes a stand on what aesthetic experience amounts to, and takes as its model the appreciation of fine art. For Dowling, Leddy and others, an aesthetic experience is prompted by an object standing out from the flow of ordinary perception, and demanding our notice as being unusual or unfamiliar in some way. I call this the “extraordinarist” stance, and it is not new: from Kant onward, aes-

thetic experience has been characterized as being importantly different from the ordinary perceptual, cognitive or moral relations we have to the world around us.

The weak formulation's extraordinarist position is not its only stance: it further claims that our appraisal of the everyday must be modelled on our experience of fine art. We see this in the "therefore" of Leddy's earlier assertion. But approaching the ordinary as extraordinary does not entail that we treat it as fine art. For Kant in particular, the beauty and sublimity of nature provide striking experiences while also being importantly different from works of art. By making this further move, and adopting the model of the fine arts for everyday objects, theorists of the weak formulation make what amounts to a category mistake between works of art and, to use Danto's phrase (1981), «mere real things». In doing so they not only undermine the initial impetus of the movement but they distinctly narrow our conception of aesthetic experience in general.

A critique of the weak formulation requires that we counter each of these separate stances and I will begin with the second. Following Robert Stecker, I will make a distinction between artistic and aesthetic value, and argue that as everyday objects are not works of art, they carry no artistic value, although they may have aesthetic value. As such, they ought not be approached in the manner of works of art. While this argument will not undermine the weak view altogether, it will make room for taking the strong view more seriously. For *Everyday Aesthetics* began by seeking the inclusion in philosophical aesthetics of objects and activities that are not part of nature (to be appreciated as natural beauty or sublimity might be) and if they are also not works of art, or akin to works of art, then perhaps an alternative conception of aesthetic experience is precisely what is needed to give them their due. That is, without the model of fine art, there may be no extraordinarist model left for proponents of the weak formulation to rely on. And this opens the way for everyday phenomena to provide the paradigm for aesthetic experience that the strong formulation seeks to provide. But let me first say a little more about the weak view itself.

While a number of theorists share the intuitions of the weak formulation, this is by no means a homogeneous approach. For instance, there is disagreement about what objects are appropriate for our attention. Irvin, in her depiction of itching, scratching and drinking coffee believes these actions can be rendered «quietly exquisite and even strangely foreign when done with full attention» (Irvin [2008]:31). For Dowling and Brian Soucek, this is not sufficient. Dowling argues that the "core" of aesthetic experience is its «normative aspect»

that «legitimately engage[s] critical attention and interest» (Dowling [2010]: 240, 229). Drawing on Kant's distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful, Dowling claims that in judgements of the latter the emphasis is on «*common* and communicable experiences» rather than reports about «one's private subjective responses» (Dowling [2010]: 237). And Soucek states quite bluntly that «[I]acking an object that is at least in principle publicly accessible, one simply lacks an aesthetic experience» (Soucek [2009]: 225), thus excluding somatic pleasures and private states from the realm of the aesthetic.

In spite of these differences, though, theorists of the weak view share similar accounts of the broad nature of aesthetic experience itself. Irvin adopts Robert Stecker's "minimal conception" where aesthetic experience is «the experience of attending in a discriminating manner to forms, qualities or meaningful features of things, attending to these for their own sake or for the sake of this very experience» (Irvin [2008]:27). It is essential, Irvin notes, that the experience «be accompanied by an evaluation» and cites Stecker's claim that «one does not have such experiences without one valuing them in one way or another» (Irvin [2008]:27). Irvin, moreover, agrees with Soucek that these evaluations need to be objective and subject to norms (Soucek [2009]: 29), even though she asserts that they can be applied to private sensations. And Dowling, in his reliance on Kant, conceives aesthetic experience in a similar way, as involving a normative judgement about the mere appearance of a thing, made for its own sake without any attendant inclination or desire (Dowling [2010]:228). Their methodology for the appreciation of the everyday (whatever this category is to include) thus proceeds upon a fairly stable and conventional view of aesthetic experience in general, as including a normative and objective judgement about an object that is perhaps attended by pleasure of a certain (disinterested) kind. This experience renders an object extraordinary in that it becomes separated from the flow of our experiences and concerns, and is appraised for its own sake; an appraisal that is unlike other forms of judgement we might make.

Turning specifically to the art-like nature of these experiences, Leddy's recent work provides its clearest articulation. While he acknowledges that everyday objects are not works of art, they nevertheless «can be aesthetically appreciated by way of perceiving through the eyes of an artist» because artists are «the true experts in the aesthetics of everyday life» (Leddy [2012]: 114, 99). Leddy's position is that the ordinary «is uninteresting or boring and only becomes aesthetic when transformed» (Leddy [2012]: 112) and he effects this trans-

formation through his conception of “aura”. Aura is not an aesthetic property per se but an experience of an object as «having the quality of heightened significance in which it seems to extend beyond itself» (Leddy [2012]: 116-7). It is a phenomenological characteristic of an object *as* experienced, in an intensified and art-like way. This experience is attended with pleasure; requires «imaginative perception»; and what he calls an «aesthetic attitude» or a «sensing in a certain way» (Leddy [2012]: 128-31).

What Leddy (and more implicitly Dowling and Irvin) trade on is a view of art as being somehow meaningful or profound, and they seek to extend this view to our experiences of the mundane objects and activities that make up our everyday lives. Only by attending to the ordinary in this intensified way can our experiences be called truly aesthetic. In this, they also echo Paul Ziff’s much earlier claim that «[n]ot everything has meaning but anything can be given meaning» (Ziff [1997]: 28), and giving meaning to quotidian phenomena appears to be the final condition for experiencing them aesthetically.

Whether or not this view of art is correct – and I will accept a broad construal of it here for the sake of argument – it is the extension of this approach to the everyday that immediately concerns me. For the weak view seems to suggest that my experience of a bowl of peaches on my dining room table, to be aesthetic, must not only involve a normative evaluation, but be qualitatively similar to, say, that of a still life of a bowl of peaches by Chardin or Cézanne: what each means may differ but all three carry meaning, and experiencing them as significant is paradigmatic of aesthetic experience at large. Leddy invokes the aesthete and the flâneur as exemplars for the appreciator of the everyday: «[s]uch a person seeks to see the world with the eyes of an artist» (Leddy [2012]: 260), and it appears that only by adopting this stance can the ordinary objects and activities of our daily lives have any kind of aesthetic dimension.

These further claims strike me as patently false: an ordinary bowl of peaches need not be meaningful to be beautiful, and my experience of it need not be profound in order to also be aesthetic. I will counter this art-centred model by elaborating on Stecker’s minimal conception of aesthetic experience before returning to problems with an extraordinarist view more generally.

2. *Aesthetic and Artistic Value*

As Irvin mentioned, for Stecker aesthetic experience at minimum involves an act of evaluation, or a judgement about the object presented to us. It also involves a valuing of that experience itself, when we attend to the object “for its own sake”. But Stecker’s position is more complex than Irvin presents. He argues that «experiences are not the only things that have aesthetic value. The objects of those experiences have aesthetic value too» (Stecker [2013]: 3). We attribute value to the object when we «perceive and/or believe» that it possesses «forms, qualities and meanings» (Stecker [2013]: 3). That is, we assert the presence of aesthetic value when we make a judgement about a given object – ie. that it is beautiful or sublime and so on. This is what makes aesthetic experience «object-oriented» (Stecker [2006]: 2, 4).

Stecker’s work over several essays focuses on value rather than experience (although he holds that the former is grounded in the latter) and he discerns aesthetic value to have a number of elements. First, it is autonomous in the sense of being intrinsic, or valued for its own sake. It is also autonomous in another sense, in that it is «not defined by, derived from, or [...] a function of other values» (Stecker [2013]: 1): it is *sui generis*. Second, aesthetic value need not be positive or experienced as pleasurable: we can be shocked or dismayed while still valuing the experience or the object in question. Appreciation, then, «can be both positive and negative» (Stecker [2006]: 2, 5). Third, aesthetic value «can be found almost anywhere, in artworks and natural objects, but also in many everyday things» (Stecker [2006]: 1). It is «independent from other values and of the type of object experienced» (Stecker [2013]: 4). Finally, as Irvin notes, Stecker’s account is disjunctive: forms, qualities and meanings need not all be perceived as present for us to make an assertion of an object’s having aesthetic value (Irvin [2008]: 27).

Putting these elements together, Stecker claims that aesthetic value «is not derived from any institution or practice. It is everywhere. It has to be defined in its own right [...]. Aesthetic value can be realized in different ways in different media, but it cannot be a different value in different media» (Stecker [2012]: 361).

Stecker makes these assertions without taking either a realist or anti-realist stand about the ontological status of this value. It is enough, for him, if we can distinguish it from other values, such as cognitive, hedonic or moral values, and understand aesthetic experience as

an experience of this particular kind of value (Stecker [2012]: 361; [2013]: 5, 9). On this view, the aesthetic value of my bowl of peaches could indeed be coincident with the value of Chardin's *Basket of Peaches with Walnuts, Knife and Glass of Wine* (1768), or Cézanne's *Dish of Peaches* (1890-1894), provided that I have had a similar aesthetic experience of each, and assert that all three are, for instance, beautiful. But Stecker's goal in describing aesthetic value in such broad terms is to make the case for a further kind of value that only artworks possess – artistic value – that cannot be applied to everyday things.

By artistic value, Stecker refers to «a type of value not identical with, but that may include, aesthetic value» (Stecker [2012]: 355). He provides two main reasons for holding that there is such a value. The first he claims is derived from the appearance of “anti-aesthetic” art (or “anti-art”), from Dada through conceptual art, to various other avant-garde forms. These works «lack aesthetic value, or lack sufficient aesthetic value to explain their value as art» yet they do have significant value as art: «it *follows* that there is nonaesthetic artistic value» (Stecker [2012]: 356). The second reason is that typically when interacting with artworks as viewers or critics, we value *more* than their aesthetic properties, even if they have a high degree of aesthetic value. Art «is valued as an object of interpretation: it has art-historical value as well as cognitive and ethical value». And valuing artworks in these further ways just is «responding to them *as art*» (Stecker [2012]: 356). Hence, there is again good reason to believe that there is nonaesthetic artistic value.

While Stecker is cautious about attempts to define artistic value, he does go some way towards specifying its characteristics. First, it is heteronymous in that it is «derived from a plurality of more basic values» (Stecker [2013]: 4) such as the cognitive, ethical and art-historical values mentioned above. Second, its determination must be non-essentialist because, while a number of values can be artistic values, «what is an artistic value will not be uniform across all artworks» or all times (Stecker [2012]: 359). Third, determining the artistic value of a given work «requires understanding what the artist who makes the work is intending to do in it»: this value, rather than being *sui generis*, «arise[s] within artistic traditions or practices» (Stecker [2013]: 4). Artworks have instrumental rather than intrinsic value as «objects capable of delivering aesthetic experience to those who understand them» (Stecker [2006]: 5) but understanding them is essential to our appreciation.

By understanding the work, Stecker is clear that he means interpreting it, and in particular interpreting it *for meaning*, thus emphasizing only one of the terms from his earlier dis-

junctive account of aesthetic experience in general. «This is a matter of discovering what an artist does in a work, usually [...] as a result of intending to do just that» (Stecker [2012]: 357). Understanding the work is a key method for distinguishing artistic value from other adventitious values it might also have. For example, a painting's financial value, or its value as covering a hole in the wall can be discerned without understanding the work itself. But the various values relevant to the artwork *qua* art arise because «imbuing the work with such a value is part of the artist's project in making the work and appreciating the value requires understanding the work» (Stecker [2012]: 360). Noël Carroll, in a different context, has likened this experience to an "I/Thou relation" (Carroll [2004]: 285), where our interaction with art «is also a matter of a conversation between the artist and us – a human encounter – in which we have a desire to know what the artist intends» in part because we wish to be a «capable respondent» in this conversation (Carroll [2004]: 287).

To appreciate an artwork *as* art, then, requires an assertion of its artistic value, through a process of interpreting what the artist intended to achieve in the work, even if this achievement includes the eradication of discursive meaning itself. If we consider Chardin's still lifes, for instance, we find them characterized as an experiment in «pure figurality» (Ogée [2000]:432) where, as Condillac has written, «[w]e are beneath the passions, in a psychic area which does not allow itself to be spoken» (Ogée [2000]: 439). They are part of the genre that Bryson has called the «farthest from language, and so the hardest for discourse to reach» (Bryson [1989]: 227). Nevertheless, to appreciate Chardin, we must understand his achievement. The paintings may also have aesthetic value – they may be beautiful or harmonious – and we can experience them as such. But *as* art they are more than this: they also embody artistic values that a bowl of peaches in my house cannot have. I may have certain intentions as I arrange the fruit, and make conscious decisions about the bowl I will use or where I will place it, but however much care I take I am not creating a work of art and the finished product will not require the kind of interpretive attention an artwork demands.

If Stecker's conception of artistic value is plausible, a gulf opens between the values of ordinary objects and those of art – and between how we understand our experiences of each. Stecker's conception of artistic value arises within practices and traditions of art-making. If there is no such practice or tradition, the object in question is not a work of art. Thus, with interior decoration, or fruit arranging, or furniture, we can ask «are these, like painting, media within which there is an art form?» (Stecker [2012]: 361) and the answer is

no. We could, presumably, “cook up” a category of “furniture art” (Stecker [2012]: 361) but this would be inconsistent with current practices and norms. When we talk of the “art” of interior decorating, it is an honorific term: unless and until this activity is recognized as an artistic practice, it will perhaps have aesthetic value but no artistic value *as art*. Further, artistic value is tied to meaning, and art appreciation to its interpretation. If we return to Carroll’s metaphor of a conversation, or an I/Thou relationship, we can see that art requires more than just perceptual attention from us, and that we in turn approach it with higher expectations than those of visual or auditory pleasure. Art, Carroll notes, «is obviously in part a matter of communication» and we bring to our experience of it «our ordinary human disposition to understand what another human being is saying to us» (Carroll [2004]: 285). This is in part why Stecker urges that aesthetic satisfaction not be the only source of value we have in our encounters with artworks; the notion of artistic value is meant to capture our belief that works of art are not merely objects of beauty or grace but also of significance. Whether we cash this out in intentionalist or non-intentionalist terms, this significance is integral to how we mark off artworks from other kinds of things.

With this (loose) notion of art, and (non-essentialist) conception of its value *as art* in hand, we can see that in approaching an everyday object as significant, or “reading” it for its meaning, we are making a category mistake: ordinary things and everyday activities are not artworks or art practices, and as such, while they may have aesthetic value, they can possess no artistic value. Our model for their appreciation thus cannot be that of our understanding of fine art. This is not to suggest that interpreting everyday objects for meaning is impossible: we entertain ourselves by “seeing” cloud formations as animals, for instance, and one could indeed view my bowl of peaches as a meditation on *vanitas*, as perhaps Leddy’s *flanêur* might. But in such cases, Carroll would suggest we are being «willfully silly» (Carroll [2004]: 286) for the sake of aesthetic amusement; we are not mistaking clouds for bona fide works of art, nor are we asserting that an appropriate aesthetic experience of them *requires* such interpretation. If we are, then our approach to these ordinary phenomena is deeply misguided. To maintain an art-centred stance, the weak formulation must either defend these kinds of assertions (as Leddy seems to) or radically broaden the notion of “art” on which it relies.

Stecker’s distinction between aesthetic and artistic value presents a quandary for the weak formulation: if fine art is not to be the model for the appreciation of the ordinary,

what is? Without it, relying only on his minimal conception of aesthetic experience would seem to render our experiences of sofas, chairs and so on identical to our experiences of natural beauty – or of anything that is not art. But this threatens to trivialize the movement's original goals. For *Everyday Aesthetics*, as I understand it, has sought to achieve more than merely an expansion of the range of objects fit for our attention; it has asserted that there are important differences in the way that we appreciate the mundane and quotidian, that merit separate attention. It is here that the strong view shows some promise: we may have to accept that there currently is no model in the philosophical tradition that can be used to adequately capture the aesthetic texture of our responses to the ordinary. And this may in turn indicate that the extraordinarist stance is not adequate to our theoretical needs. The strong formulation attempts to consider the ordinary as it is ordinarily experienced, and if it has not yet been successful, a look at its failure may provide clues for what a methodology of the ordinary actually requires. I will take Arto Haapala's work as representative of the strong view here.

3. *The Strong Formulation*

Arto Haapala's essay *On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness and the Meaning of Place* is critical not only of the art-centred model but of the weak formulation's general stance that aesthetic experience must be somehow extraordinary. What he calls "strangeness" refers both to unfamiliar objects and to the kinds of responses we have to things in general. When we face the new or unfamiliar, we «pay special attention to it», and we become sensitive to its "aesthetic potentiality" because «our senses are more alert in a strange milieu» than at home. In our attention to the strange we adopt «an outsider's gaze» or a «visitor's curiosity» (Haapala [2005]:44), a stance that, for instance, we find in Leddy's notion of aura and his invocation of the flâneur, or in Irvin's rendering of mundane activities as "strangely foreign" when they arouse our attention.

In contrast to an aesthetic of strangeness, Haapala attempts to theorize the everyday as an aesthetic of the familiar but by this he does not mean merely paying attention to objects that are quotidian or mundane. He writes, «I shall not consider aesthetic objects that attract our attention and stand out in our normal daily routines»; he instead seeks to consider «exactly the opposite – what is the aesthetic relevance of the everyday per se» (Haapala [2005]:

40)? He develops an existential account that ties familiarity to the notion of place, in the sense that living somewhere or “settling down” involves making an environment *jemeinig* or “one’s own” (Haapala [2005]: 45). Adopting this term from Heidegger, Haapala argues that «placing ourselves within an environment» is the process of “home-building”, where home is «a place where everything is familiar» (Haapala [2005]: 46). Even a work of art can become familiar in this sense if, for instance, that Chardin has hung for years above the fireplace, and a quotidian object such as a bus can become strange if we are visiting a foreign city for the first time.

Jemeinigkeit is an important part of human existence, related to ideas of attachment and belonging. For Haapala, «it would be impossible to live in a constant state of strangeness, of not creating ties, of not getting rooted to any degree» (Haapala [2005]:49) because home-building is central to being human. The familiar in this regard can be contrasted with the strange, not in terms of the everyday versus the striking or the artistic, but as that to which we are attached and to which we belong, compared with being in a state of homelessness or alienation.

The difficulty for Haapala lies in showing how his project is specifically an aesthetic one, and he is aware of the problems of isolating the aesthetic element within his larger philosophical framework. He acknowledges that in a state of familiarity we tend to lose the kind of “special sensitivity” that aesthetic experience has so often been seen to require. «By definition there is less distancing, less possibility of appreciation» (Haapala [2005]: 50) because, as familiar, everyday objects are meant to pass beneath our direct notice. He invokes Heidegger’s analysis of the tool, *das Zeug*, to highlight this point. A tool exists between the user and its purpose, and «as long as it functions properly, there is no need to pay attention to it» (Haapala [2005]:49). It is only when the tool malfunctions that we begin to see it as an object, inspect it, and consider it as separate from ourselves. Until and unless that happens, tools – and our familiar surroundings in general – «disappear into their function» as background, or as things we use to achieve our everyday purposes (Haapala [2005]:49). To bring these things to aesthetic attention seems to contradict the point of Haapala’s focus on the everyday, as doing so seems to require that we first render them “strange”.

Nevertheless, Haapala gestures in the direction of an aesthetics of the familiar. «Place», he claims, «has its own aesthetics»; the familiarity of the everyday can give us «pleasure through a kind of comforting stability» in objects and activities that are routine and safe,

that make us feel «homey and in control» (Haapala [2005]: 50, 52). We «enjoy scenes familiar to us because we know them well and because we are deeply rooted in them» ([2005]:51), and thus our appreciation is precisely grounded in their utterly ordinary and quotidian familiarity. Beyond these gestures, however, Haapala can only define the aesthetic aspect of the everyday in broadly negative terms, as an aesthetics of the «lacking» or of the «quiet fascination of the absence of the visual, auditory and any other demands from the surroundings» (Haapala [2005]: 52). What he calls to our attention is, ironically, that which commands no attention at all.

While this proposal counters the extraordinarist view, it seems to reduce the aesthetic to some kind of quiet pleasure we feel when things are in their place and we are in control; a gentle satisfaction that “all is right with the world” and we know where we belong in it. But it is not clear how such pleasures are specifically *aesthetic*: a hot bath or a cozy seat by the fire also provide comfort and security in the way Haapala intimates, and these feelings accompany a large number of our bodily or sensuous enjoyments. Here we seem to concede the aesthetic to an ethical-existential idea of place that provides us with meaning and identity. And here we are no longer attending to things for their own sake, or asserting their intrinsic value, but prizing them for the comfort, stability, or *lack* of stimulation that they provide.

What is interesting about Haapala’s account is the import he claims for the everyday in human lives at a fundamental level, and his acute awareness of the tension between objects ordinarily experienced and those same objects extraordinarily experienced. But the difficulty in attempting to theorize the familiar in this way is in making the case for this project to actually be an aesthetic one. Haapala may have established the significance of the everyday but he has not provided an account of its particularly aesthetic character. Nevertheless, in his failure lie the seeds of a proposal for a methodology for Everyday Aesthetics.

The strong formulation holds that the everyday can provide paradigm instances of aesthetic experience that are not bound by the conventions of the philosophy of art or any other extraordinarist view. To manage this we need to focus on the aesthetic elements of the everyday without either exoticizing those elements or subsuming them within some larger normative framework. We also need to show that the aesthetics of the everyday need not separate these experiences from the flow of our daily lives and concerns. Haapala is surely right to claim that quotidian objects and activities are more integral to our lives

than the “time out” we take to visit art galleries or museums, or the fleeting moments of natural beauty that come to us. They are more familiar in this regard. And, as every other element of our lives has been claimed to have an aesthetic dimension, surely these have as well. Further, he is correct in noting that often the ordinary things we use tend to blend into our instrumental goals and concerns. Making the quotidian more visible is, in part, what prompted Dowling, Irvin and Leddy to insist on viewing it as extraordinary. But there may be a way to theorize the ordinary that meets these requirements, without running into the problems that Haapala’s conception faces. I will conclude with some modest suggestions for a methodology of the everyday.

4. Towards an Aesthetics of the Everyday

My recent work (Forsey [2013]) focuses particularly on designed objects rather than everyday activities, yet claims that in appreciation the two are intertwined. While the ordinary things we use tend to disappear into the background of our instrumental goals and concerns, it is not only when they break down that they come to our attention: we also notice things when they work extremely well, when they perform their functions with an ease or grace that calls for our appreciation. That some things are better than the norm does not make them strange, or remove them from the everyday any more than it makes them honorary works of art: they remain the chairs, bowls and coffee-pots that we use everyday. It is simply that at times some of them come to demand our aesthetic – as opposed to practical or ethical – attention, that they do so within the context of our daily use of them, and they do so without acquiring a layer of either artistic or existential meaning that demands interpretation.

The factors involved in our aesthetic appreciation of the everyday thus run a line between the extremes of the weak and strong views. For one thing, to merit my approbation, a given coffee-pot, for instance, must perform its function, and do so very well. Were it to make bad coffee, or fail altogether, it would indeed become strange but not in a meritorious way. Fulfilling its function is a minimal requirement for a designed object to be a candidate for aesthetic appraisal. More than this, to appraise the coffee-pot I must be a coffee drinker. For those who do not drink coffee, or have never made it, the pot will be a mystifying artefact. But this means that a certain amount of culturally and historically specific knowledge is

required for me to make this judgement: the coffee-pot must be part of my everyday life and activities rather than an exotic phenomenon that catches my attention. This speaks to Haapala's notion of home-building in that the coffee-pot must be familiar, but its aesthetic merit does not reside merely in its place as part of my home: it stands out as exemplary because of its functional excellence. Standing out, however, does not mean that the pot acquires the patina of a special aura: its aesthetic value does not prescind from its nature as a coffee maker that I use everyday.

Thus I suggest that we replace the notion of meaning with that of function in our methodology of the everyday: an ordinary object does not need interpretation, and was not created to communicate something to us. But it was designed to be used, and only by using it and assessing its success in fulfilling its function can we make an aesthetic judgement of its merits. The replacement of meaning with function also replaces an extraordinarist stance with one of familiarity in that the object must be part of our daily lives and routines for us to assess it. One of the presuppositions of the weak view is that the ordinary elements of our lives are uninteresting, or boring, and that for the most part we pay them no attention unless and until they come to stand out for some reason. Haapala's notion of *das Zeug* is equally influenced by this view. But surely this is wrong: the everyday is neither so dull – nor are we so oblivious – as the extraordinarist stance supposes. I need be neither flâneur nor aesthete to give aesthetic care and attention to even the simplest of activities such as making coffee or putting peaches in a bowl. The replacement of meaning with function also allows us to maintain one part of Stecker's minimal conception of aesthetic experience, where we attend to the object itself, and where our assessments can in principle be communicated to others. But we can have aesthetic experiences of everyday objects without separating them from the flow of our daily activities – indeed, their embeddedness in our lives is crucial for our aesthetic assessment of them. And we can see how these everyday experiences differ from the beauty of nature, for example, in that they are contextualized against a background of cultural knowledge and use. My suggestion here does not require us to significantly alter Stecker's notion of aesthetic value as that which we attribute to the objects of our experiences; we attend to the forms and qualities of things (but not their meanings) and we judge them to have value, producing, perhaps, a distinct kind of pleasure in our interactions with them. But, thanks to the work of Haapala, we can see that aesthetic value, while it may be autonomous in the sense of being intrinsic to the object, is *not* au-

tonomous in the sense of being *sui generis* because it only arises from within our daily lives and concerns.

In closing, let me return for a moment to that bowl of peaches on my dining room table. My arrangement is not an artistic practice; its achievement is not a work of art. Wherein lies the aesthetic dimension of the arranging, or the arrangement once complete? This very quotidian practice has nothing extraordinary about it, but it need not therefore go unremarked by the discipline. Consider my action and the choices it involves: this bowl or that one? Peaches piled high or laid out? I may try out different variations, and find this bowl too cramped, or that colour too garish. My action is purposive, and has more than one guiding concern. There are practical considerations such as utility (the peaches won't ripen in the fridge; I don't want them rolling around on the counter) and functionality (they'll rot in a plastic bag). There may be other normative considerations too, for example that I am having friends over and want the house to be welcoming. In the end, I decide that this arrangement, here, is "just right". This judgement has an important aesthetic dimension that Haapala overlooks: practical and other considerations having been addressed, what remains is how the arrangement looks and whether it pleases me. But the aesthetic judgement is not distinct from my very grounded engagement (in this case) in my domestic life: it is neither of the extraordinary nor of the lacking, and my conclusion of "rightness" is neither the assertion of a *sui generis* value that is independent of other considerations that motivated me, nor primarily an establishment of identity and meaning – and comfort – in my life. To maintain the strong stance, we lose the particularly aesthetic element of our daily lives to a sense of belonging; to maintain the weak stance, we become alienated from the way that the aesthetic is an important part of our lives and concerns. What we need is a middle road between the two, one that asserts the aesthetic as a thread that runs through – is intertwined with – other judgements, other actions, other values and other concerns that are central to our lives. It need not be marked out as somehow separate and exotic. The movement of *Everyday Aesthetics* is uniquely positioned to reconceptualize the aesthetic texture of our daily lives, if we can but move beyond the traditional preoccupations of the philosophical discipline. In this I believe lies its greatest promise, and its greatest challenge.

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