



# **PATHS FROM THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART TO EVERYDAY AESTHETICS**

**EDITED BY OIVA KUISMA, SANNA LEHTINEN AND HARRI MÄCKLIN**



## Paths from the Philosophy of Art to Everyday Aesthetics

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PATHS FROM THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF ART TO EVERYDAY  
AESTHETICS

Eds. Oiva Kuisma, Sanna Lehtinen and Harri Mäcklin



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## THE AESTHETIC VALUE OF THE UNNOTICED

### ABSTRACT

This paper comments on a paradox that seems to be the crux of everyday aesthetics: the aesthetic character of the non-aesthetic. The ‘everyday’, characterised as the routine, familiar, taken for granted, or just unnoticed, seems to be opposite to that marked as worth looking at, and aesthetically contemplating. The aim of the article is to hold that the unreflective consciousness of objects, environments and events in everyday life permits their aesthetic appreciation. The paper considers the role that art and memories play in bringing into consciousness that which was previously ‘unnoticed’.

### INTRODUCTION

The aesthetics of the everyday focuses on and tries to characterise the kind of aesthetic experience we obtain from the ordinary, daily, everyday life. In particular, everyday aesthetics seems to demand an approach different from the approach adequate for the aesthetics of art and nature. Arto Haapala’s work in the field has especially endorsed the idea that aesthetic experience of the everyday should respect what is characteristic of the experience of the everyday, namely, its commonplace, routine, unexceptional, ordinary character. Indeed, hiding the inconspicuous character of daily life could lead everyday aesthetics to miss the point of the very object of its investigation. While for other approaches to everyday aesthetics the central point is – according to the title of Thomas Leddy’s 2012 book – the appreciation of “the extraordinary in the ordinary”, Haapala insists in the necessity of explaining the aesthetic experience of the everyday *qua* everyday, that is, as commonplace and familiar. For

Leddy calling an experience aesthetic implies separating it from precisely the ordinary, even if minimally, involving the objects of appreciation with “aura” (Leddy 2012, 127 ff.) For Haapala everyday objects and environments may be aesthetically appreciated in their scarcely noticed presence.

Pointing to the unobtrusive character of the experience of everyday life, a problem to philosophical aesthetics immediately arises concerning the very concept of aesthetic experience. From Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* onwards, aesthetic experience is thought to involve a reflective judgment, a pleasant awareness of the collaboration of our cognitive faculties. The form of representation of beautiful and sublime objects provide our mind with the occasion of feeling the free play of the mental faculties. In contrast with the scientific and practical apprehension of the world, the mere form of the object in itself, with independence of its utility and cognitive or moral relevance, gives aesthetic satisfaction. Aesthetic properties are considered to be sensual salient properties of the object, which are identified in that disinterested pleasant experience.

Dewey’s pragmatist conception of aesthetic experience has been invoked to solve problems linked to autonomist Kantian aesthetics (Shusterman 2000). However, Dewey’s conception of aesthetic experience also represents it in contrast with everyday experience. To have an aesthetic experience is to have “*an* experience”, which, contrary to our daily interaction with the world, is complete, united, “self-sufficient”, and full of significance: “...we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment” (Dewey 1934, 37) So, both in Kantian and Deweyan traditions aesthetic experience is marked by its differentiation from the daily experience of the world.

In this article, I will examine the aesthetic character of everyday life in its characteristic ordinary and commonplace experience. First, I will point out the ubiquity of aesthetic experience in everyday life and its very often irreflexive character. Second, I will point to the role that art and memories play bringing to consciousness what passed unnoticed when we lived it. Finally, I want to stress that it is not art or remembrance that aestheticizes everyday life, but that the everyday was aesthetic even when unnoticed.



## AESTHETIC PLEASURES AND HUMAN LIFE

**A**esthetic pleasures of all kinds play an important role in our lives. We enjoy the contemplation of moon and clouds, the singing of birds, the sound of waves, attractive people, agile cats, fragrant flowers, colourful gardens and elegant terraces, vintage furniture, fashion, jewels, all kind of ornaments and decoration, and many more things that are, happily, not so unusual. The enjoyment of these things makes life better, more valuable. In general, the aesthetic quality of objects, people, activities and environments contributes significantly to human wellbeing and happiness. Although aesthetics has barely paid attention to these commonplace objects and activities, it is certainly possible for aesthetics to defend their aesthetic value as objects or phenomena which attract our attention by their appearance.

We admire human beauty, for example. Some people's appearance strikes us in the middle of a room full of people, walking down the street among the mass, or projected on the screen of a movie theatre, as beautiful, and marked with different kinds of beauty. There are expressive, sexy, mysterious, graceful, merely superficial, and other kinds of human beauty. In these cases, human beauty like the beauty of animals or urban environments can be appreciated just as art or nature are. That is, it can be an object of an experience that considers sensuous properties – by themselves or together with other relational properties – and the way they affect us. A person's face may attract our attention for the way in which the different parts – hair, eyes, mouth, neck, shape of the head, skin colour – are arranged in the whole. But also, hairstyle, glasses, and clothing may attract us as original or elegant. Sometimes a woman strikes us for her similarity to a Botticelli figure, as Odette seemed the reincarnation of Zipporah to Swann in *Swann's Way*.<sup>1</sup> In the first case the face is contemplated as a natural object (to the extent that a human body can be contemplated as something completely natural); in the second, as an artefact, an artistic artefact, produced with aesthetic and other intentions; in the third case, it

<sup>1</sup> Swann projects on Odette his vision of Zipporah, a figure in a fresco by Botticelli in the Sistine Chapel: « Standing next to him, allowing her hair, which she had undone, to flow down her cheeks,

is a real person perceived under the influence of a fictional character.

The aesthetics of human body may well be central for the aesthetics of the everyday, given the ubiquitous, fundamental and influential role that appreciation of human beauty and aesthetic qualities play in human relations and culture (Irvin 1998; Naukkarinen 2016). Moreover, human actions result from body movements and the appreciation of those movements and actions is consequently intertwined with that of the body. However, in the examples given above the human body is appreciated as an object with an aesthetic value according to the same criteria with which we would appreciate a beautiful object, artistic or natural. Indeed, the human body is a field of different types of aesthetic appreciation, relative to the attitude adopted by the beholder, the features taken into consideration, etc. A visage can be appreciated from a merely formal or sensory perspective. It may be more or less photogenic, well-proportioned, harmonious, etc. Or it can be appreciated as expressive, or suggestive of moral virtues or traits of character. In this case, the visage is melancholy, friendly, agreeable, profound, etc. The human body, and more specifically the human face, is probably an example of the impossibility of neatly separating sensory aesthetics and deep aesthetics, aesthetics of nature and of art.

In everyday life we also have continuous contact with art: we visit museums, are surrounded by architecture and public art, listen to music, go to the movies, etc. And maybe not Botticelli, but certainly TV series influence the way people perceive other people and conceive human relations. On a daily basis, we make a lot of aesthetic decisions too: related to art or not: about which book to read or going to which museum, about clothing, haircuts, manners, hobbies, friends, etc. Some of them are of relevance to our entire life: where to live, with whom, etc. Aesthetic decisions are those in which aesthetic reasons are the most relevant, but decisions of other kinds incorporate aesthetic reasons too. Aesthetic reasons have more or less weight, depending on people, but are certainly of more relevance

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bending one leg somewhat in the position of a dancer so that without getting tired she could lean over the engraving, which she looked at, inclining her head, with those large eyes of hers, so tired and sullen when she was not animated, she struck Swann by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, in a fresco in the Sistine Chapel". Marcel Proust (2001, 230–31)

than we want to admit. Actually, it is unlikely that the attractiveness of someone does not play a part in our reasons for choosing not only a sexual partner but also a friend, or even a colleague. So, everyday life is imbued with aesthetic perception, understanding, appreciation, judgment, and, eventually, behaviour.

## THE AESTHETICS OF EVERYDAY AS EVERYDAY

**N**ow, important as it is to emphasise the active role of the self in aesthetic perception, understanding, appreciation, and judgment, it is also necessary to acknowledge that many of what can be considered aesthetic preferences, decisions and behaviour may pass ignored, repressed, or simply unnoticed by the self. Aesthetic motivations may not be acknowledged socially or by the individual, but an immense part of our behaviour depends on factors that are unknown to ourselves.<sup>2</sup> The everyday includes not only what is commonly perceived, believed or felt, but also all that is hidden, taken for granted, and unnoticed. In this sense, Highmore (2002) cites Bataille's phrase: "the everyday ... receives our daily inattention", to conclude that "things become 'everyday' by becoming invisible" (Highmore 2002, 21).

Yuriko Saito approaches everyday aesthetics also by considering the invisibility of everyday phenomena and the lack of consciousness of our daily engagement with aesthetic matters. According to her, there are "aesthetic dimensions of our everyday life that do not result in 'an aesthetic experience'" (Saito 2007, 104), meaning that even though in daily situations we very often react, act, and make decisions of an aesthetic character, we do it without necessarily having an aesthetic experience, at least if considered "disinterested and contemplative" (Saito 2007, 48 ff.). Saito stresses the unreflective character of aesthetic judgment and the action-directed, instead of contemplative, dimension of most of our daily life.

Like Saito, Haapala's account seeks to locate everyday aesthetics in the

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<sup>2</sup> On aesthetic bias and the social discrimination of unattractive people see Irvin (2017)

analysis of the specific character of the everyday, namely, its everydayness. Strikingly Haapala defines the everyday as that which is non-aesthetically marked, at least from the point of view of traditional aesthetics. However, unlike Saito, Haapala still tries to capture the specific phenomenology of everyday interactions with the world. He conceives his approach as an “existentialist account of the phenomenon of the everyday and its aesthetic character” (Haapala 2005, 40). The starting point is, therefore, the phenomenology of everyday life, which is felt as routine, dull, automatic, unremarkable. However, there is a limit point in the phenomenology of the everyday, and it is the point at which the everyday turns invisible, unnoticed. The immediate consequence is that there cannot be an aesthetic experience of that which is not noticed. Paradoxically the aesthetics of the everyday life becomes the aesthetics of the non-aesthetic.

The paradox of the aesthetics of everyday life is about the appreciation of that which does not attract our attention, is not worth being looked at, or is taken for granted. How is an aesthetics of the unnoticed possible? If aesthetic appreciation comes from the disinterested contemplation of an object, how can something that is scarcely looked at, but intermingled with our daily goals and desires, be aesthetically appreciated? The aesthetics of the everyday is not about the experience of salient properties in the object of disinterested contemplation, but about our *being in the world*, Haapala suggests, using Heidegger’s notion in *Being and Time*. Consequently, the aesthetics of the everyday is about our engagement with objects, environments, other persons, and actions, which is fundamental to human existence. And that provides us with a sense of being at home in the world and with a sense of personal identity and belonging to a community, which characterises the aesthetic experience of the everyday.

Haapala (2005) provides an example of the experience of place, which is characteristic of our daily experience of the world. A place is not just a location, the setting of our life; it is not only a geographical point with its own natural or historic “character”. A place has also personal meaning, it is related to our own biography, and it is “sensed” in a certain way. Basically, a place is strange or familiar to us, and its aesthetic character is determined by that. Our place, the place which we inhabit, and in which we develop our daily life

is made significant by our uses of it, by the meaning we give to its elements, by the way in which we deal with it. In turn, the place also constrains and structures our movements, visions, and actions. Familiarity, place, and everyday are interconnected: “Familiarity and everyday are the very heart of place” (Haapala 2005, 40). The key aesthetic notion is familiarity, which is how we sense the place. The elements that form part of our place are barely noticed, but rather taken for granted. They constitute the background in which daily activities take place, and also where extraordinary events might happen, and unexpected objects draw our attention.

Thus, strangeness may make its way through everyday life. Indeed, a new building, a work of public art, a new bridge, strikes us as an intrusion in our place, to which we react with a sense of strangeness, first, and then by making aesthetic judgments about its shape, meaning or fitting in the place. Leddy takes it on that making something aesthetic always implies making it strange in a certain sense: to frame, to point it out, to highlight it among the rest of the objects as objects with “aura”. Dishabituation and estrangement were concepts bound to the theory of Avantgarde; but renewing and refreshing our perception, discovering hidden or overlooked aspects of the world, are very generally taken to be among the main values of art. Admittedly, “(i)n a sense of the word *aesthetic*, strangeness creates a suitable setting for aesthetic considerations” (Haapala 2005, 44). Now, according to Haapala, in opposition to the strangeness that characterises the aesthetic of art, familiarity marks everyday life. After a process of habituation in which the new object or environment is included in our routine, it becomes everyday.

Haapala’s point is that besides the aesthetics of strangeness there is an aesthetics of familiarity. And that if there is to be an aesthetics of the everyday, it has to be an aesthetics of familiarity. In order to do justice to the aesthetic character of the everyday we need to take familiarity into account. At the same time, he suggests that the aesthetics of strangeness is pretty different from the aesthetics of familiarity. Something familiar is something towards which we have personal ties: we are attached to familiar things and persons, we are rooted in our place. For that reason, the aesthetic experience of familiar things, places, people, is personal, and cannot be

disinterested, detached, as the aesthetic experience required by a work of art, or a natural environment. The experience of the familiar retains the aesthetic character because it is related to pleasure and value, wellbeing and good life. It is sensory aesthetic in the sense that it is perceptually experienced, but meaningful in the sense that what gives sense to space and facilitates familiarity are actions, behaviours, and habits that link us to the environment and make it our place.

From this point of view, the paradox of the aesthetic experience of the unnoticed everyday may be elucidated, considering that what usually goes overlooked may flow into our consciousness as aesthetically valuable. The unnoticed enters our awareness, not as something extraordinary or strange, but rather dyed with familiarity. According to Haapala, from time to time we may take a breath on our daily ups and downs, and we can come to perceive aesthetically our surroundings, familiar scenes and things. Certainly, it will oblige us to take “some distance”, but the pleasure we will obtain “is not distinct from the pleasure that we obtain from the fulfilling of the daily routines, but *dependent on them*” (Haapala 2005, 51, *my italics*). Things are not “transfigured”, or experienced “with aura”, but the aesthetic experience of the everyday demands keeping the closeness and intimacy that the object possesses for us. Although we may perceive just its sensory appearance, it does not deprive the thing of its special meaningfulness for us.

So, Haapala’s solution to the paradox of the unnoticed passes for admitting that in order to be appreciated the object has to enter the sphere of consciousness. And this is enough for Saito to point out that Haapala is still “wedded to defining aesthetic as something pleasurable” (Saito 2007, 50). Ideal for Saito is to acknowledge and leave room for “those dimensions of our everyday aesthetic life that normally do not lead to a memorable, standout, pleasurable aesthetic experience *in their normal experiential context*” (Saito 2007, 51). That is, for Saito a feeling of familiarity still preserves the pleasurable character that characterises aesthetic experience out of daily contexts. According to her, to do justice to the everyday *in its normal experiential context*, as overlooked and unnoticed, demands that daily aesthetic decisions and behaviour do not involve a special feeling or pleasant consciousness of the object. However, aesthetic decisions

and behaviours in the realm of the unnoticed require also some kind of experience of objects, scenes, and actions.

Non-reflective consciousness seems to me the most promising way to understand the unnoticed character of the daily experience of objects and actions. First, in order to explain the – usually – successful manner in which we handle daily with objects and find our way in the world. And secondly, in order to explain how the aesthetic experience of the everyday “depends on” the experience of everydayness, as Haapala suggests (Haapala 2012, 51). Pleasure is not something added to everyday life by the aesthetic detached contemplation, but something that is recovered by aesthetic experience from our daily life.

In what follows, I want to explore what I take to be Haapala’s account of the aesthetic experience of everyday *qua* everyday. My aim is to go deeper into the idea of noticing the unnoticed or perceiving the overlooked, as the passage from non-reflective awareness to reflective awareness. So that when we take a step back and look at the commonplace, we may in some sense keep the experience we had when we were dealing with it in our daily routines. I assume that the psychological description of the experience of the everyday is that of a non-reflective awareness of the object, the action, the environment, or the person we experience. We are aware of the sun streaming through the balcony, the fragrance of freshly made coffee, or the wind on our face while riding the bike... even if we don’t necessarily stop and pay attention to them. Actually, we sometimes avoid paying attention to them, for whichever reasons, for instance, not to be distracted from other occupations. Writing on my computer I withdraw my attention from the stream of sunlight entering the room through the balcony, in order to concentrate on my paper.

Very often in daily routines, our mode of experiencing objects and actions is distracted. We may do several things at a time: while preparing sandwiches for the children’s lunch, we drink our coffee, listen to the radio, open the windows to ventilate the rooms, and think about a meeting in half an hour. Some of the things we do automatically, while some others require more concentration. We are not reflecting on the perception of objects or the action itself, but it does not mean that we are not aware of

the objects involved in the activity or the atmosphere around. Something or just coincidence may make us see more intently the object in question. For instance, we suddenly realise that our favourite song is being played on the radio, or we realize that the window needs cleaning. A positive and a negative aesthetic experience results in each case. However, we were hearing the radio and seeing the window before realising it. We might also retrospectively bring to mind the experience that we were having distractedly, without realizing that we were having it. For instance, when driving to the meeting the image of the dirty glass may enter our thoughts. And this can only happen because we saw that it was dirty before. I could not make the aesthetic decision to clean the windows, without having a displeasing experience becoming more salient in my mind.

When we stop and look at the sun illuminating the room, we may make an aesthetic scene of it, bringing it out of life limited by space and time and contemplating it *sub specie aeternitatis*. In this sense, we are redeeming the ordinary from its ordinariness. There is certainly something really lacking when I stop typing on my computer and contemplate the sun entering through the balcony. What is lacking is my own presence, my movements and actions inside the scene. I stop being part of the environment to become a beholder. And, consequently, my experience changes. However, there is a sense in which the experience may retain its ordinariness. The sunshine enters my office room every day more or less at the same time, illuminates the place from the same point, warming the room and giving it a golden light in the evenings. I enjoy it almost daily, even if only from time to time, especially in winter, do I reflect on it, that is, I become aware of my perceptions. When I do, the experience does not lose its everyday character. Moreover, as Haapala points out, it depends on the familiarity brought about by time (Haapala 2005, 51).

My point is that sunshine entering through the balcony was aesthetically pleasurable also when it was unnoticed, that is, non-reflectively perceived. It is not that the non-aesthetic features of the object are aesthetically experienced only once they are attentively contemplated, but rather that the object was from the beginning aesthetically perceived, if non-reflectively. There are some symptoms revealing that my activity was suffused with



pleasure also during the time it was routine: I didn't realise the time passing, my body expressed calm and comfort, or I smiled. Equally, children playing don't reflect about having fun, but they have: they jump, run and laugh. To the contrary, familiarity does not convert a certain ugly building in our way home into something beautiful. Familiarity allows us to see it daily without paying attention to it. We don't perceive its ugliness constantly, but from time to time we are sadly disappointed by its presence.

## MEMORIES OF THE UNNOTICED

**E**vidence of the aesthetic experience of everyday objects, scenes and actions lies also in the fact that we can retrieve it when we come to perceive again the same objects after a time, or when we recall them, they are evoked by others, or represented in works of art. When years later we visit again a place, or smell the fragrance of a person, or have the old sensation of having fun or being surprised by something, that is possible because we once had those perceptions and sentiments. And we may now recall the satisfaction we got formerly from them. Our present experience is not as new, but it is permeated by the sense of something already lived.

Some episodes, moments, atmospheres or journeys, that in everyday life can pass unnoticed, moments in which we are happily, melancholically, or excitedly engaged, without reflecting, in an action, perception, or conversation, can also be brought to reflexion in memories. In the *Search of Lost Time* Proust wrote about involuntary memory and the recollection of moments and persons that bring us the happiness of past times. There is no reason to think that these recalled moments are happy only now in the present, due to nostalgia or idealization. Or that it is writing or literature that make them happy. If episodes from past times are remembered now as happy, it may be because they were happy then, even if then we were not reflexively aware. Swann liked transiting from art to life and then to art, as when he perceived Odette as Botticelli's Zipporah. The taste of a madeleine made Marcel recollect his childhood summers at Combray: the smells in the

kitchen, nap time reading in bed, with the blinds closed protecting the room from the sun in the hottest hours of the day; all these were everyday pleasures of Marcel's childhood. Certainly, it is reminiscence that brought those moments to reflexion and recovered them from insignificance. However, the content of the memories are moments really lived by the child Marcel, now recollected by the adult Marcel as pleasantly familiar.

I am not prepared to enter here in the epistemology of memories, but I want to consider a question that recurrently arises when dealing with memories and autobiographies. I am referring to experiential memories, that is, memories from the inside, or the recollection of the past from the first-person perspective, a recollection not only of what happened but of what it was like for the self to live it. The problem is the very likely manipulation of memories and the impossibility of the true representation of past times. The main reason is of course that the person has changed, and even if there is a serious aim at being truthful, the same things do not look the same or have the same significance. Time also blurs the facts: we mistake people for other people, years, and even the proper content of what happened. More to the point, there is no inner mark of the truth of a memory. However, no matter how frequent mistakes and conscious or unconscious manipulation are, there is something like remembering truly.

In part, the problem arises from thinking about memories as representations of facts that are somewhere held in reserve in the mind. Remembering something is considered as drawing a picture or a print out from the reservoir of our mind. But this is not what Marcel, the narrator of the *Search* did. He did not draw a memory from the back of his mind to write about it. But involuntary memories bring to his consciousness past events that are part of his identity and explanatory of his ways of thinking and acting in the present. So, in the novel, the narrator tells truly a past event from the first-person point of view, that is, he expresses himself sincerely, respecting the expressive and aesthetic character of the present experiences of the past. He did not take the mental and discoloured picture of an event, in order to revive and embellish it with literary decoration. That is, literature does not repair the missing parts and manipulate the less interesting ones, to build a

nically written, beautifully structured whole. Instead, the value of *In Search of Lost Time* is considered to be the narration of the past from the present, and the exploration of memory, truth, human life, and the passing of time.

It is likely that in reading *In Search of Lost Time* we don't care about the truth or falsity of the narrated content. That's not my concern here, but to show what it would be like for a memory to regain the experience of the past, to evoke it. Recollection is often the private imagination of past events in which we more or less luckily are able to evoke the experience we had of them. Proust is often regarded as defending the impossibility of regaining the past. However, even though only involuntary memory can escape the traps of nostalgia, it is still possible that "truth appears and grants us happiness in moments of insight linked to the retrospective consideration of sensual experience, the 'making strange' of what previously had been a matter of assumption and ready certainty" (Stewart 2004, 114).<sup>3</sup>

## THE UNNOTICED IN ART

**F**ollowing Proust's novel, I now want to hold that for the reason already given, that we can only recognise or remember something that we had somehow experienced before, art may also be capable of retaining the characteristic experience of everyday life. That everyday life can be enjoyed, and that happiness depends much on our capacity to be sensitive to it has been often remarked. That art has been able to represent the everyday up to the most overlooked aspects of it has also been claimed. From different perspectives, and in a variety of art forms, from literature to music or painting, artists have striven to represent the elusive, the unnoticed, character of daily life. Artists and philosophers have assumed that in order to do that it is required to make the familiar strange. However, the Avant-garde idea that the aesthetic experience of art is essentially an experience of estrangement is unwarranted.

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<sup>3</sup> Stewart makes again the point of the 'estrangement'. However, I take it to be just one more occasion in which the notion is used by habit. It does not add anything to the idea that what was assumed before is now realized.

Certainly, the unnoticed, neglected, lived but not contemplated aspects of the everyday, are brought to contemplation and reflection by art. And, certainly, a work of art is a representation, and needs to be interpreted; it is just the opposite of daily life, which is immediately taken in. But all that does not imply estrangement. Art may make the familiar strange, and vice versa. However, it may also be the case that art represents the everyday, and, furthermore, that it is able to evoke what is peculiar of the experience of familiarity. Actually, that is the point of many works of art, which aim to conjure the everydayness of the everyday.

Photography is in some sense particularly adequate to fit the task of representing the everyday since it makes it possible to mechanically and transparently represent what happens in front of the camera. That way, Henri Cartier-Bresson's photographs succeeded in capturing the "right moment", in which it may be said that the extraordinary appears in the middle of the ordinary. In *Derriere la Gare Lazare* (1932) a man leaps across the water of a puddle in the surroundings of the train station. The photograph captures the figure on the air and the symmetric reflection on the puddle. The photographer was lucky and ready to shoot the exact moment in which an ordinary event transforms the complete scene. Together with the geometric pattern of the station fence and different elements of the setting, human figures and architectonic elements, light and obscurity, movement and stillness, balance and unsteadiness are organized in a composition with aesthetic sense and value transforming the grey non-place behind the train station in a poetic urban scene of lights and shades, stabilities and movement. Like in other photographs by Cartier-Bresson, geometry and human presence, the permanence of the setting and the transience of actions combine in a composition that is visually striking.

Cartier-Bresson has very often been mentioned in relation to the representation of everyday life. As an artist, Cartier-Bresson "makes us attend to the message of reality" (Gombrich 1991, 198) and has the capacity "to make reality speak" (Gombrich 1991, 199). And nevertheless, Haappala writes about Cartier-Bresson as representative of the art "where the *quotidian* has been used as the subject-matter", but also as an example for his scepticism

about the power of art of representing everydayness: "...my point is that in the context of art the everyday loses its everydayness: it becomes something extraordinary" (Haapala 2005, 51). The value of Cartier-Bresson's art is not about the ordinary, but about the extraordinary in the ordinary, the humorous, the surprising, the unlikely in the middle of the everyday<sup>4</sup>.

However, sometimes art not only has the everyday as subject-matter, but it is able to represent the everyday life *qua* everyday, that is, to evoke everyday everydayness. Photographic transparency does not warrant the representation of everydayness, but, in contrast, artistic opacity is sometimes capable of doing so. Let's consider painting: among her pictures of mothers with children, Mary Cassatt's *The Child's Bath* (1891) represents a moment in which a woman with a girl in her lap washes the girl's foot in a porcelain basin full of water. I find the painting a great example of the evocation of daily domesticity. However, the work is greatly pictorial, that is, artistically opaque. In the first place, the influence of Degas and Japanese prints compositions meets the eye. The proper composition underlines the artistry, with a superior angle that imposes the foreshortening of the pitcher in the foreground to the right. Secondly, there is artistry in representing the texture and touch of different materials, the fabric of the rugs, maybe wool, the silky dress, the porcelain, the water, the varnish of the furniture, and the wall-paper. The bourgeoisie interior is luxurious and beautiful, "the well-provided upper-middle-class bedroom or parlour, in which her curving body (the mother's body) can provide shelter and sustenance" (Nochlin 2008, 191). But, apart from the conspicuous presence of the medium – or maybe due to it – the painting is capable of evoking the physical contact of mother and child, and the intimacy of the moment. The painting achieves it thematising the touch. On the one hand by means of the representation of stuff and texture: wool, silk, water, flesh...; on the other hand, by the way

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<sup>4</sup> The relationship between Cartier-Bresson and the everyday has usually been remarked. Commenting on Danto's phrase that we respond to Cartier-Bresson photographs "in the fullness of our humanity", Rubio (2016) claimed that what is at stake is "our capacity of seeing, in the magic of Cartier-Bresson's photographs, the world that we see on a daily basis, realising that it is the same world. It is *the* world". In this sense, Rubio points in the opposite direction of the idea that Cartier-Bresson unveils the magic in the quotidian to the idea that it unveils the quotidian in the magic.

in which the figures touch each other, the hand on the foot, the huge hand of the mother around her daughter's waist, the daughter's hand leaning on the mother's knee.

According to Linda Nochlin: "Cassatt's mother and child images speak openly of the sensual fleshly delights of maternity" (Nochlin 1999, 190). Caresses, crossed gazes, sleepy attitudes and the children's nudity are the main motives of these paintings. Understanding and appreciating them hinge on the capacity to recognize the pleasant experience of bathing toddlers, and the happiness of intimate domesticity in the everyday relationship with children. Beyond the aesthetic qualities of the artistic representation, the value of the work lies in my opinion in its capacity to evoke domesticity in its characteristic everydayness.

The representation of something that has been considered characteristic of everydayness also contributes to the value: the absorption of the figures in the domestic activity. Both mother and child stare at the basin, collaborating automatically in the action. They seem unaware of themselves and of the other, but they are attuned in their movements and in fulfilling their actions. Indeed, they are in comfortable control of their actions because they are aware of their own body and movements, and sensitive to the touch of the other's body and movements. Mother and child are unreflectively aware of all that and of many other things – like perhaps the temperature of the water and of the room.

Michael Fried has dedicated most of his writings to the topic of absorption in painting. But in *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (2008) he deals particularly with absorption in photography and its relation to the everyday. In that context, he writes about Jeff Wall's photographs under the insight of Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's conceptions of the everyday. Fried aims to demonstrate "the philosophical – specifically, the ontological – depth of which painting is capable" (Fried 2008, 49). And comparing Wittgenstein with Wall about art and the everyday, he cites Wall: "The everyday, or the commonplace, is the most basic and richest artistic category. Although it seems familiar, it is always surprising and new. But at the same time there is an openness that permits people to recognize what is there in the picture, because they have already seen something like

it somewhere. So, the everyday is a space in which meanings accumulate, but it's the pictorial realization that carries the meanings into the realm of the pleasurable" (Wall cited by Fried 2008, 64).

Fried pointed out that those pictures in which Wall deals more successfully with the everyday are those in which there are absorbed figures. However, contrary to what may seem the case, they are not 'documentary' photographs of people in the subway, on the streets, or looking at paintings in a museum, but rather fictional and pictorial photographs, where the final picture is the result of much posing, acting, collage and montage of hundreds of shots. While *Morning cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona* is 'nearly documentary' (because the cleaner is the real worker, doing his daily maintenance work in the real building), *View from an apartment*, which I want to analyse briefly, is almost completely fictional (in the sense that the scene is staged, and the characters are acting). *A view from an apartment* depicts the interior of an apartment with two big windows – like *vedute* – in the background, one of them looking towards the port of Vancouver. There is a dialectic between interior and exterior marked visually by the difference in light tone. Lights are already on in the apartment, and illuminate softly and warmly all over the room, while outside there is as yet some daylight. The lamps from the interior reflect on the glass. The port is full of cranes, ships, and industrial buildings, but there is nobody to be seen, while inside the apartment two young girls seem absorbed in their activities, silent. The figure that attracts the beholder's gaze walks in diagonal to the foreground of the image, downcast eyes, holding a napkin in her hands, maybe for ironing, since there are at sight an ironing board and an iron, and some clothes in a basket. She is wearing home-clothes. The other girl lounges on a sofa browsing a magazine. The apartment looks relatively messy, though not chaotic, and in a certain way contrasts with the calm that both figures express.

The attitude of both figures shows the lack of concern about the proper image and about being seen characteristic of domesticity and absorption. In Fried's terms, they lack the to-be-seen-ness, which is proper of public social life. In this sense, everyday awareness of oneself is subject to the same 'daily inattention' we dedicate to objects. Even if it is obvious that the sitters are acting for the camera, the presence of a beholder is avoided,

oblivious of the external world as the figures are: one apparently occupied in her thoughts doing automatically her housework, the other distractedly browsing the journal. As spectators we have no access to the women's inner lives. No gesture is expressive of their mind, apart from the state of self-absorption. There is no hint that permits possible identification or empathy. And however, we recognize in their countenance and gestures expressive of nothing, in their way of moving in the room or sprawling out on the sofa, in the way the objects spread out in the sitting-room, the look of domesticity and the sense of everydayness familiar to all.

Obviously looking at paintings or photographs we adopt an external perspective and miss the kind of engagement proper to everyday life. And when we in the first-person are living the moment, we don't realise it; at least up to a certain point, because as adults in a social world we are almost always conscious of being seen, and therefore conscious of our own image. Absorption is the state of mind which better represents the point in which we are scarcely conscious of ourselves but completely engaged in an action. These moments of absorption amount to an almost complete loss of self-awareness. So, when we are absorbed in the action, we are barely conscious of ourselves, but if we become aware of ourselves or of being observed we lose this basic and spontaneous contact with the world. In order to aesthetically appreciate the everyday, we must – maybe just for an instant – switch to the third person perspective, in regard to ourselves or to others. We do it very often in art and life, but the role of spectator does not prevent us recognising the everyday in others or in ourselves.

In conclusion, if we can aesthetically appreciate the everyday adopting a third person perspective on us, looking at others, in memories, or in art, it is because the experience of the world in those moments of daily inattention proper to everyday life had already an aesthetic quality. Appreciating the everyday in our memories, in other's activities, or in art, is bringing to reflexion what was there before – overlooked and hardly noticed – without changing it. That is why an aesthetics of the extraordinary is not adequate for everyday life, but maybe it is not an accurate aesthetics of art either.<sup>5</sup>

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