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Everyday Aesthetics and aestheticization: reflectivity in perception

Abstract

Undoubtedly, the relationship between Everyday Aesthetics and aestheticization is controversial, although they share the same historical context. Against everyday aestheticians' tendency to refuse any proximity between everyday aesthetic experience and aestheticization as the "contagion-logic" underlying commodified reality, we will show how they are both based on the reflective structure of aisthesis. The latter emerges thanks to a critical conception here illustrated through both an archeological path (involving Sibley, Kant, and Herder), and the consideration of the determining factors for current aesthetic practices. Our thesis is, therefore, that Everyday Aesthetics can take advantage of a non-ideological approach to aestheticization, in order to become aware of the perception theory it actually needs and to promote an incisive critical stance.

Keywords

Everyday Aesthetics, Aestheticization, Perception

1. *Everyday Aesthetics and the metamorphosis of aesthetics*

It is no coincidence that Everyday Aesthetics has gained ground as a sub-disciplinary trend especially over the last two decades. Its rise and its success follow the complex and stormy passage of aesthetics through distinct phenomena that have developed, often irregularly, during the twentieth century. They are partly directly related to the discussion on the disciplinary *status* of aesthetics, and partly derived from more general cultural and social transformations. The most important reasons of the metamorphosis of aesthetics are:

1) the crisis of the modernist paradigm of art as an autonomous field of experimentation and research on purely defined or definable symbolic and expressive languages;

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- 2) the collapse of the canonical System of Fine Arts that has accelerated with the explosive beginning of pop and the legitimization of some of its manifestations as art proper;
- 3) the tendency to “artificate” aesthetic practices that, as with the case of design and fashion, did not seem at least immediately ascribable to Fine Arts and that have generated for a long time, and are currently still generating, controversial opinions as concerns their integration with them;
- 4) the increasing dissatisfaction for the disciplinary restriction of the realm of aesthetics to the field of art, with the consequent tendency to go back to and draw from the problematic conceptual bundle implied by the term “aisthesis” in its original meaning, in order to define the domain of aesthetic research broadly speaking;
- 5) the rise, in parallel to the hypertrophic growth of virtualization, of the wide-spread process of aestheticization of social and experiential reality (with the subsequent emphasis of the dimensions concerning appearance, *mise en scène*, and spectacularity, that also apply to issues that – such as “identity”, “value”, “efficacy” – were usually excluded from the pure aesthetic determination in order to preserve its substantiality);
- 6) the combination of globalization and localism, that has determined the configuration of a cross- and multi-cultural context, which is able to generate micrological practices connoted by “exotic” components that are nevertheless considered somehow compatible with local realities.

The analyses realized by “everyday aestheticians” (i.e., supporters of Everyday Aesthetics as a sub-discipline of aesthetics) tend to consider only some of the above listed elements. Often their attention is focused on transformations that more directly bear on the disciplinary *status* of aesthetics in general and briefly explained in points 1-4, almost proving that what we are dealing with is a movement which is internal to a precise institutionalized world as the academic one. Nothing wrong about that. Both Vico’s dispute against “ratio studiorum” and Kant’s “conflict of the faculties” are renowned evidences of how in questions of principle an intra-academic controversy flourishes.

In the specific case at issue here, however, this preference for questions concerning the disciplinary *status* of aesthetics determines a methodological and theoretical problem. In fact, from the univocal attention towards the disciplinary *status* often derives a lack of inves-

tigation on and understanding of those very concrete reasons that direct theory towards specific thematizations. It is certainly legitimate to reflect upon the nature of an investigation on the aesthetic dimension of the everyday by comparison and contrast with the aesthetic dimension of art, and to wonder whether with such investigation we are exploring a new continent or we are simply, so to speak, crossing the extreme borders of an already-known continent; all this, though, should not go to the detriment of the essential question regarding the motives that drive to the exploration – or, leaving metaphors aside, it should not distract the attention from the nexus that exists, if it exists, between a precise material context (points 5 and 6) and the necessity to find methods and approaches that are able to provide its theoretical awareness. It is then important to verify to what extent precisely the concrete context provides, in reality, an essential stimulus for the constitution of a (sub-)discipline.

Amongst the six points listed above as the reasons that have contributed to the transformation of aesthetics in the last century, it is precisely the phenomenon described in point 5, that is to say aestheticization, that seems to require *Everyday Aesthetics* to pursue a critical understanding, that is also a critical *self*-understanding. The link between them emerges, in fact, as more than evident if we examine the set of factors that are coefficient in the process of aestheticization. It is hard not to see a correspondence between *Everyday Aesthetics'* programme and a phenomenon that, as Nielsen (2005: 67) has noted, “calls for a concept of aesthetics that transcends the horizon of high art and opens up for the entire breadth of aesthetic formation of meaning that is created and recognized as such by current social practice”. And it cannot be denied that it applies also to *Everyday Aesthetics* the consequent goal to achieve a conception of aesthetics that “must be able to differentiate between and operate with the different discursive articulations of aesthetics as high art, artefacts from popular culture, and the more diffuse process of general aestheticization”.

The fact that in yet ambitious writings on *Everyday Aesthetics* it is difficult to find constitutive analyses in the aforementioned direction gives the impression that aestheticization is a critical limit within *Everyday Aesthetics*. The question of aestheticization of our life conditions almost appears as a nucleus which has been “repressed” with the elaboration of this sub-discipline. *Everyday aestheticians* usually prefer to start from aestheticized reality as a matter of fact, rather

than elaborating critical strategies supposed to transform its (“unconscious”) energy into a structural component of their theoretical programme. By doing so, though, they vitiate their frequent claim of non-indulgence against it. How, then, does Everyday Aesthetics look at aestheticization?

2. *Practice and logic of aestheticization*

Of course, we are not maintaining that nobody has ever dealt, more or less explicitly and with a more or less critical attitude, with the problem on which naturally converge both the theme of aestheticization and the programme of Everyday Aesthetics, that is to say the aestheticization of everyday life. Amongst the researches that can be at least considered “culturally close” to Everyday Aesthetics, important examples are those of Postrel (2003) – who, without explicitly using the category of aestheticization, investigates a rich phenomenology of the latter – and Featherstone (2007: 65-72), who titles a chapter of his book precisely “aestheticization of everyday life”². How not to mention also all those analysts and/or critics of consumer and hyper-consumer society who, according to various theoretical-political orientation, have repeatedly drawn attention on how this phenomenon affects everyday life, starting from Walter Benjamin until Jean Baudrillard, and even more recently the researches carried out by Reckwitz (2012), Lipovetsky and Serroy (2013), and Böhme (2017). Nevertheless, the issue that we specifically aim to address here is exactly the relationship that exists between aestheticization and Everyday Aesthetics as a philosophical sub-discipline.

² Speaking of Cultural Studies, these topics are also addressed by Highmore (2011), although he does not openly thematize the problem of aestheticization. It must be noted that Highmore chooses directions that do not cross the studies realized by everyday aestheticians, even though both temporal and thematic proximity between the two are evident. In the second chapter, titled *Everyday Aesthetics* (pp. 21-57), he provides an overview on the matter starting from British Enlightenment, passing through Dewey and Dilthey, until Jaques Rancière. A comparison between Everyday Aesthetics as a sub-disciplinary programme and the alternative strategy represented by Cultural Studies tradition has not been realized yet. Perhaps the topic of the aestheticization of everyday life could be an excellent test bed for their better understanding and for the identification of their strengths and weaknesses.

Indeed, also from this point of view a certain amount of caution seems necessary. It would in fact be foolhardy to maintain that nobody in the field of Everyday Aesthetics as such has ever raised and dealt with the question of aestheticization. For instance, a precise clarification of the concept in relation to the notion of “artification” has been realized by Naukkarinen (2012). Moreover, Saito on the one hand operatively refers to this concept, in relation to a number of topics that are central to her phenomenology of the aesthetic in everyday life (among the most important ones, for instance the notion of “transience”; Saito 2007: 184-204), but on the other hand she sees in aestheticization as such a phenomenon that risks to compromise the programme of Everyday Aesthetics. With its pervasiveness, it could in fact generate a sort of wide-spread aestheticism that would in turn transform everyday experience in an art-like experience, nullifying in this way the qualifying point of her whole perspective:

I believe that one of the projects of everyday aesthetics is to discern when we should render the ordinary extraordinary so that we can derive the maximum aesthetic value and when we should rather preserve and focus on the ordinary, seemingly non-aesthetic, reaction. Indiscriminate aestheticization can lead us far from our aesthetic life in its very everyday life context, making it more art-like experience, when extricating everyday aesthetics from art-like experience is one of its *raison d'être* in the first place. (Saito 2007: 260)

What emerges here is a bivalent attitude, that employs the concept of aestheticization but, at the same time, tends to reject the phenomenon in its cultural and social relevance. And this ambivalent attitude is not limited to Saito, but is evident in several everyday aestheticians. Then, in order to understand how all this takes place, and why all this takes place exactly the way it does, it seems convenient to consider what is perhaps the most explicit approach to the theme of aestheticization emerged within Everyday Aesthetics. It has been elaborated by Leddy (2012), one of the volumes that best provides an organic – and for several reasons also very convincing – presentation of the whole perspective at issue.

Leddy's starting point in this analysis is a symptom of his overall negative interpretation of the topic. Aestheticization is introduced, in fact, as an indictment Everyday Aesthetics would have been charged with by some of its detractors, in order to highlight the risks, which are intrinsic to such theoretical programme as a whole. That is why the paragraph that Leddy dedicates to the “problem of aestheticiza-

tion” begins with the following sentence: “One complaint about everyday aesthetics is that in blurring the distinction between art and life it makes things more beautiful than they really are: it aestheticizes them” (Leddy 2012: 207). Against this charge Leddy elaborates a defence strategy based on two elements, which are similar to those we glimpsed in Saito.

On the one hand, Leddy stresses how the aestheticization of everyday life contents would not be per se a practice that degrades aesthetic value. Often Great Art has employed (or rather elevated) everyday objects as contents of artistic representation (Leddy provides wide and richly documented analyses of these elements throughout his volume). Just as when an everyday object is aestheticized by means of a “beautiful” representation traces of triviality or, sometimes, even of ugliness are not necessarily eliminated from the represented object, the emphasis of the aesthetic value conferred to objects and actions that can also be trivial does not imply per se a decrease in the quality of aesthetic value as such, that is inherent also to the representation and to the medium through which the latter is produced. Exemplary is non-artistic photography, in which the photographic procedure – by virtue of its “relative transparency” – if well employed determines not only the value of the image, but also, at least in part and potentially, the value of the aesthetically appreciated object (Leddy 2014: 61).

On the other hand, Leddy tries to decidedly set *Everyday Aesthetics* free from the negative aspects that, according to him, almost fatally come along with aestheticization as a contemporary phenomenon. Here, it may be said, what is central is no longer the practice of aestheticization, but rather the logic of aestheticization. As practice, aestheticization can be described regardless of any evaluative attitude: it consists of emphasizing some properties that end up qualifying a content by virtue of a representative or expressive act; it is precisely this act that constitutes the basis of the process, and all this could happen both in the context of the art-world and in the context of everyday life. As logic, contrariwise, according to Leddy aestheticization has evaluative implications that can hardly be avoided. In this regard, he mentions a passage in which Naukkarinen defines aestheticization as “the notion that more and more things get absorbed into the aesthetic sphere, and that aesthetic matters are becoming increasingly important in our daily life” (Naukkarinen 1998: 203). Conceived in this way, aestheticization is a process according to

which, Leddy says, “we increasingly choose things (e.g., products) based on aesthetic, rather than other more appropriate criteria – religious, political or economic, for example” (Leddy 2012: 208), and that hence competes with other principles for the determination of value. It expresses the spreading, and the prevalent supremacy, of the aesthetic as compared to other possible components or dimensions of experience. And since such spreading of the aesthetic would be functional to commodification, since it is easily compatible with the promotion of consumerism pursued by advertising and marketing strategies, we may say that underlying aestheticization there is a sort of “contagion-logic” that can pathologically and progressively infect various areas of everyday life. Nevertheless, Leddy believes that aestheticization as pathogenic logic would not be directly relevant for *Everyday Aesthetics*. Exactly because what we register of its spreading, still metaphorically speaking, are only epidemiological data, the latter constitute at most “considerable anecdotal and some statistical evidence” of aestheticization as contagion, and thus an issue to be rather addressed by sociology: “Whether it is true is a matter for sociologists to determine” (Leddy 2012: 208). The everyday aesthetician is not directly concerned with it, insofar as his/her thematization of the aesthetic dimension that connotes also everyday things does not involve the promotion of their transfiguration in terms of commodification.

If, then, aestheticization as practice does not seem to be a problem for *Everyday Aesthetics*, on the other hand, as logic, linked to commodification processes, it becomes a territory towards which it is necessary to set clear boundaries. For Leddy all this becomes even more evident if we connect, almost to make them coincide, the logic of aestheticization and the postmodern proliferation of signs and images, ever more functional to market processes of late capitalism or of post-capitalism. In this regard, according to Leddy, aestheticization clearly reveals itself as “a narrower domain than that covered by such writers as Carlson, Irvin, Saito, Berleant, Scruton and myself”, because

[t]he rapid flow of signs and images characteristic of our time would be only one part, albeit an increasingly important one, of the overall field of everyday aesthetics. It would relate mainly to the experience of people addicted to web-surfing and media consumption, although admittedly we all see many signs and images as we drive down urban streets, leaf through magazines and shop in malls. (Leddy 2012: 210)

The mistake of associating Everyday Aesthetics to the logic of aestheticization is due not so much to their incompatibility (as proven by the fact that on the level of practice there are no difficulties in even overlapping them, although only partially), but to their in principle extraneousness. From here derives a thesis formulated by Leddy, which is both revealing of his position and – in my opinion, as we shall see – fundamentally problematic: “it is hard to see how appreciating the neatness of one’s room, the tastiness of a home-cooked dinner, or the look of one’s garden as a function of this proliferation of signs” (Leddy 2012: 210), and hence, by extension, as a function of aestheticization as logic. The theoretical and conceptual incongruence that exists between Everyday Aesthetics and aestheticization would be revealed by the essential heterogeneity between the principles that the corresponding experiences follow. Their intertwining in certain events would be merely contingent.

On the basis of this heterogeneity Leddy claims the possibility to assume a critical, if not even a refusal attitude towards aestheticization within Everyday Aesthetics. In terms of ethical-political stances, such attitude results both peremptory and shareable, once the negative connotation ascribed to the notion of aestheticization has been delineated: “Commercialization is probably thought bad because it encourages consumers to revel in shallow pleasures at the expense of ones that are deeper and more fulfilling. I wouldn’t want to lend intellectual support to that!” (Leddy 2012: 210). But even more interesting is what all this implies on a theoretical level, that is to say when the conditions of possibility of this aversion are defined. They, returning to a previous metaphor, embody the active ingredient that should make effective the therapy that Everyday Aesthetics applies to the pathology of aestheticization. Such conditions of possibility are nothing but those that materialize through the reflective intensification of the aesthetic experience achieved thanks to this new sub-discipline, that is to say a process that should provide that awareness which could be also employed, eventually, even in the form of a refusal of the dangers of commodification. It is exactly from this premise that a line that separates the compliance with aestheticization, on the one hand, and the critical attitude claimed by Everyday Aesthetics, on the other hand, is drawn. And this equally applies to those everyday aestheticians who “tend to promote unmediated appreciation of everyday phenomena”, and to those who, like Leddy, are similarly interested in that “mediated appreciation” that takes place “through the arts

not through advertising". In all these cases the role given to that aware reflectivity at which *Everyday Aesthetics* after all aims in its investigation on everyday experience, also in its aestheticized form, is decisive: "most everyday aestheticians encourage complex and sophisticated responses to everyday phenomena, not the shallow and quick responses that increase probability of purchase" (Leddy 2012: 211). And it is exactly to the extent that this reflectivity is not recognized as a feature of aestheticization as such that the contraposition between immediate (commodified) experience and mediated (reflective) experience of the aesthetic in everyday life becomes possible, so that it seems legitimate to maintain that "Although everyday aesthetics recognizes the centrality of advertising in our everyday lives, this is not the same as supporting it" (Leddy 2012: 211).

Thanks to its reflective intensification, emphasized by stressing the logical extraneousness to aestheticization, *Everyday Aesthetics* expresses, according to Leddy, all its therapeutic potential. In fact, while answering some criticisms formulated by Smith (2005) concerning the risk of a justificationist attitude that his strategy would run, he concludes:

Smith's implicit claim appears to be that the act of analysing aesthetic phenomena outside the arts, and the analysis of aesthetic properties not generally featured in the arts, will lend support to this tendency [toward the commercial aestheticization of everyday life]. However, this does not follow. Perhaps paying attention to these properties would help us to understand better the power of advertising. Although understanding the power of advertising could be used to enhance that power, it could also be used to diminish it. (Leddy 2012: 211)

3. *Antinomy or dialectics of the aesthetic?*

Everyday Aesthetics' goal, then, is a better understanding of the aesthetic contents of the everyday by means of an emphasis of the reflective dimension inherent to it. In other words, it wants to produce awareness also towards aestheticized reality. But as with any awareness that should not become a repression, it must develop through an immanent criticism of the trauma, rather than simply counter it. As regards the aesthetic domain, all this was very clear to Adorno who, while starkly criticizing cultural industry, also invited art, in which he still identified a certain utopic and emancipatory poten-

tial, to fully run the risk of falling back into commodified thing (since only by becoming “absolute commodity”, that is to say an end in itself, the artwork would embody the negation of that functionality as respects to the existing social system that constitute the ideological content, which would otherwise be a determining factor for the “commodity form”; Adorno 1970: 236).

Even without further elaborating the Adornian suggestion, here we may proceed by analogy. The relationship that exists between aestheticization and Everyday Aesthetics, as Leddy explains it, produces, in fact, a similar polarization between immediacy (of consumption forms) and mediation (by reflectivity on everyday practices and on the respective configurations that have aesthetic value). The problem is, though, that such polarization seems to be broken up into two constitutive elements. If, contrariwise, the bond between these two poles is preserved, we can avoid transforming the reflectivity that Leddy invokes into the abstract assertion of a refusal that unfruitfully counters aestheticization exactly because it doesn’t understand itself starting from the latter. In other words, the point is understanding if and how the reflective attitude rightly invoked by everyday aestheticians actually implants itself into, and in turn innerves, the immediate experience of aestheticized contents, hence truly becoming therapeutically effective in making its relationship with aestheticization dialectical rather than antinomical.

Moreover, the same relationship between experiential immediacy and reflective mediation constitutes a decisive test bed for Leddy’s theoretical proposal as a whole. Central to it is the idea that the specific content of any everyday experience connoted by aesthetic significance is an “auratic dimension” of the object or event. Such dimension is supposed to be a relational component (a “noematic” one, that is to say not contingent but structural, not factual but operative – or even: not empirical but transcendental), that manifests itself in perception (Leddy 2012: 128-9). Suspended from the factual properties which are identifiable in the empirical object or event, aura becomes the content of everyday aesthetic experience inasmuch as it is accessed through reflectivity, as proven by the fact that in order to reach its dimension – according to Leddy – an exercise is, which is analogous to phenomenological *epoché*. If this “eidetic” component was a static formal apriori, it would be far from the historical-material character suited for Everyday Aesthetics. In order to avoid all this, it is necessary to intertwine this level of reflectivity with the same con-

crete immediacy of the experiential content where we meet the reality of aestheticization. Hence, the recognition of the dialectical continuity with the latter corroborates, and does not threaten, Everyday Aesthetics' critical claims. Through this recognition, the ambition to impact, as critical reflectivity, on phenomenal forms that should be accepted as at least partially congenerous, is legitimated. Indeed, for each of the actors involved in this play, the possibility to be brought back to a general experiential structure of the aesthetic that concretely and always reveals itself as a dialectical intertwining of immediacy and mediation, becomes crucial.

Following the traces of the polarization between Everyday Aesthetics and aestheticization, the radical hypothesis of the aesthetic as a dialectical intertwining of immediacy and mediation is thus formulated. In order to verify the validity of this hypothesis we can draw again from indications provided by Everyday Aesthetics' theoretical framework. Since its essential premise is an approach to the aesthetic from the point of view of appreciation, it may be useful to specify the model according to which it is possible to consider aesthetic *perception* in such a way that it would correspond to the physiognomy of the aesthetic that we have just outlined.

A way to deal with this problem is following an almost digressive path, by addressing some theoretical sources that allow to enucleate and conceptually justify the stances that we want to defend. That is indeed what will be briefly explained in the next paragraph, according to an archaeological procedure that brings back to the origins of a specific model suggesting a conception of the aesthetic and of aesthetic perception as a nexus between immediacy and mediation. In the final paragraph, on the other hand, the same issues will be again referred more directly to the relationship between Everyday Aesthetics and aestheticization.

4. *Reflectivity in perception: archaeology of a theoretical-critical model (Sibley, Kant, Herder)*

The fact that *aesthetic* perception possesses a complex structure is confirmed by the difficulty to establish what kind of specific component distinguishes it from pure and simple perception. In order to avoid falling back into the relativism that seems intrinsic to the "aes-

thetic attitude argument”³, this component is usually ascribed not to perception itself, but to specific properties that perception would detect every time it deals with a content which is experienced as aesthetic. Hence, an aesthetic perception would be (exactly) that perception which identifies aesthetic properties. Indeed, if we had a criterion that would allow us to distinguish with reasonable certainty aesthetic properties from non-aesthetic properties, we could easily trace the perimeter of aesthetic perception and, consequently, its essential characteristics. The problem, though, is that it is not possible to establish such criterion. The reason for this impossibility is the same one that Sibley (1962) recognized on a different level, when he pointed out that aesthetic predicates do not constitute a determined, stable, and autonomous vocabulary, nor are they simply defined by the shift of meaning of some terms that would take place in the language game of aesthetic appreciation. A number of aesthetic concepts are often used in an extra-aesthetic sense: the predicate “delicate” can be referred as much to a painting, in an aesthetic-artistic fashion, as to a crystal glass in a totally different fashion; and “clean” or “tidy” can even be referred to the same space equally in an aesthetic-everyday fashion and in a totally different fashion, as with the hypochondriac neurotic, etc. Further aesthetic concepts, moreover, have (or have gained) a primitive meaning exactly in their aesthetic use.

Following Sibley, the criterion of distinction between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic must be traced back to a principle that is not included either in the sphere of the logical characteristics either in the sphere of the ontological characteristics of objects, properties, or concepts. Another way of avoiding the relativism of the aesthetic attitude argument is in fact to move the *fulcrum* of the analysis into the use of concepts *in relation to* properties of objects. In this way the attention is directed towards the modality through which the aesthetic relationship between subjective act and objective content expresses itself. And it is exactly for this reason that Sibley maintains that the aesthetic use of concepts takes place, in the framework of this relationship, when “taste” is involved: “the making of such judgements as these [i.e., aesthetic] requires the exercise of taste, perceptiveness, or sensitivity, of aesthetic discrimination or appreciation” (Sibley

³ That is to say: the thesis according to which the aesthetic qualification of experience would derive from a specific attitude adopted privately by a subject.

1962: 1). This principle may seem weak and vague as respects to the risk of subjectivism, as it has sometimes been pointed out. All this would be true if we followed a conception that would consider what Sibley calls “taste” merely something that the subject acquires thanks to private and previous experiences in turn already certified (but why?) as aesthetic, in a sort of a regressive circularity that would simply shift the problem somewhere else, without solving it at all. But, as it becomes explicit in the conclusive parts of the essay (Sibley 1962: 22-3), taste does not only concern the application of concepts, but rather their use in order to qualify (internally modify) the inter-subjective and communicative *praxis* of experience, and more specifically of perception. Consequently, these elements of weakness and vagueness appear softened, if not even eliminated. As Austin says, in the context of *aisthesis*’ expressive *praxis*, the perceptual identification of though apparent properties of things concerns the perceived world, not the perceiver: “I am not disclosing a fact about myself, but about petrol, when I say that petrol looks like water” (Austin 1964: 43). The very fact of examining aesthetic perception in relation to the judgmental, that is to say expressive, dimension that fulfils it (in the use of concepts, but also in the gestural practice, for instance), brings outside the cage in which, on the contrary, are condemned to remain both psychologism and ontologism.

What makes emerge this appeal to taste in the framework of an analysis of aesthetic perception is evident also if we go back to the Kantian matrix that probably lies behind Sibley’s argumentation. According to Kant, an aesthetic judgment is a “taste” judgment *since* it is permeated with reflectivity: it is exactly when *Reflexivität* becomes an essential component of judgment that the latter assumes the transcendental status of aesthetic or “taste” judgment, and hence differs from both cognitive, moral, and merely empirical judgments. It may again be objected that this position does not solve the problem, since it remains within the perimeter of the subjective component: isn’t it exactly within the subject that the power of judgment mediates between sensibility and understanding, between intuition and concept? Also in this case the conclusion would be hasty. In fact, that reflectivity which embodies itself into taste dismantles the model established by Kant in the first *Critique*, that sees as the ground and the centre for the constitution of experience itself an individual subject that passively receives sense data and that actively elaborates and connects them by means of concepts which are then applied through

judgments. On the contrary, in the third *Critique*, the power of judgment is related not to an individual subject (“I think”), but to a collective subject (“aesthetic common sense”) that manifests and expresses itself in acts endowed with taste, hence producing aesthetic appreciation. In other words, taste does not mediate between a sensible intuition and a concept in their specific being determined for a single subject; rather, it is the intersubjective principle of mediation between the forms (the faculties) of the sensible intuition and those of the concept. It is a reflective dimension that rises up within perception, that for this reason gets a specific intonation, becomes aesthetic.

If this well-known “high way” appears too abstract, it is worth considering that Kant also identifies a “low way”. It still concerns the reflectivity which is intrinsic to perception, that is to say to *aisthesis*, which consequently can be understood as a sphere where passivity and activity, immediacy and mediation intersect. Kant hints at it when he describes experience that lies behind taste judgment as “reflected perception” (“reflektierte Wahrnehmung”: Kant 1790: 76). From this viewpoint, that certainly Kant does not explicitly elaborate as he does with the other one (the phrase is a *hapax*), it must be said that the specifically aesthetic judgment is a judgment “of taste” by virtue of a reflective intensification that remains immanent in the perceptual *praxis*, not by virtue of a reflectivity which is imposed or projected onto the sensible intuition. This means that it is the content which is experienced in *aisthesis* that determines the reflectivity because of the configuration that it assumes in the latter. Here activity and passivity, mediation and immediacy get intertwined: the subject is as “passive” in reception as “active” in reflection, and the objectual component is as “active” in encouraging reflective suspension as “passive” in bearing its dynamic explication that is accomplished as an exploration of the object. And since in this perceptual *praxis* objective properties are not established, nor empirical subjective states manifest themselves, but the order of sensing is connected with that of pleasure or displeasure in feeling ourselves active in reception, such perception results connoted in an eminently aesthetic sense: it concerns the element that mediates between intuition and concept, that is to say it concerns judgment and hence taste.

Nevertheless, when Kant confines reflectivity to perception which underlies “taste” judgments, in order to distinguish it from perception more in general, he *de facto* establishes *in nuce* the separation of

the aesthetic field proper from other fields, in which judgment is not reflective because perception is either superdetermined by intellect and reason (in the worlds of knowledge and morality) or underdetermined as merely empirical. Reflected perception, as aesthetic, is the only case in which, according to Kant, *aisthesis* cannot be reduced to a mere passive reception of data, thanks to its ability to disclose the dimension of non-empirical pleasure and displeasure; analogously, the properly aesthetic judgment is located in specific domains, which are those where the predication of beauty is confinable, or in other words – according to Kant – first and foremost nature and then art. It is understandable, then, following this scheme, why aesthetics has been interpreted mostly as philosophy of art, and how it – when anti-psychologicistic – has given priority to an investigation starting from the search for properties which belong first of all to artworks and which should be differentiated, ontologically speaking, from non-aesthetic properties. And we know that exactly this confinement of the aesthetic to the artistic on the one hand has been at the centre of the criticism against tradition developed by the programme of *Everyday Aesthetics*, and on the other hand has been actually overcome by the dynamics of widespread aestheticization – which are exactly our two focal points here. Hence we can presume that by outdoing these limitations of aesthetic perception we could find the nucleus of a sufficiently liberal conception of the aesthetic, that would also meet today's necessities.

In order to overcome these Kantian restrictions and find a model which is more appropriate for the topics at issue here, it is thus necessary to radicalize the nexus between perception and reflectivity, a necessity which, by the way, was very well-known to Sibley, insofar as he aimed at avoiding the in principle separation between aesthetic vocabulary and ordinary vocabulary in reference to perception. The thesis of the union between activity and passivity, mediation and immediacy, in the praxis of *aisthesis*, which is not confined to the appreciation of natural or artistic beauty, clearly emerges in a philosopher, who should be considered as one of the implicit polemical targets of Kant's third *Critique*, that is to say, Herder. Twenty years before Kant, in his essay on the origin of language (1772), he described human experience in general as connoted by a reflectivity (labelled, unlike Kant, *Besonnenheit*) which is determined neither by understanding nor by reason, for it, on the contrary, lies at the roots of language, hence of cognitive determination itself. And this "activity of

reflection [*Besonnenheit*]” is present and effective, according to Herder, also “in the most sensuous state”, that is to say on *aisthesis* in general (Herder 1966: 114). Every human experience, every human perception, is thus permeated, according to Herder, by reflectivity. But if this is true, then what presents itself as endowed with an aesthetic connotation is not ontologically separated from other contents, but only intensified in this precise connotation (and this is the reason why Herder maintains that arts originate from dispositions which are located in the senses). The combination of passivity and activity in *aisthesis* is not an exception for the human being, to the extent that it becomes possible to conceive perception in general as *praxis*, as an activity which takes place in a viscous field of constraints and conditions, and which is easier to refer to the paradigm of exploration rather than to that of the simple factual ascertainment. Exploration is the union between observation and mapping, it implies to see a direction in apparent trend lines that are, after all, always uncertain although they are tenaciously pursued: a reflective mediation of perceptive immediacy, which is not cognitive determination per se, but rather generates “orientation”⁴. And it may be a quality of exploration itself bringing to the fore elements that have aesthetic value because they eminently refer to modalities, rather than contents, through which the relationship between the Self and the world manifests itself.

5. *Reflectivity in perception: everyday practices*

This archaeological path calls our attention to a new requirement that Everyday Aesthetics should match: to embody a theory of perception that implies the possibility of a reflective intensification that lies within *aisthesis* and that, hence, does not *necessarily* deal with other levels, for instance cognitive or moral ones, although the latter may be involved. Otherwise it would be incorrect to talk about everyday “aesthetic” experience. This characterization cannot be derived from the reference to a predefined set of properties, as clarified by

⁴ Going back to Kant, the essay *Was heißt sich im Denken orientieren?* (Kant 1786), published right before the third *Critique*, is enough to show how, in fact, orientation shares the same fundamental reflective structures that connote the aesthetic faculty of judgment.

Sibley (1962) and as proven by the fact that always new elements enrich the qualification of that which is “aesthetically” appreciated in everyday life. Consequently, the characterization we are looking for can only be “intensional”, due to the way experience takes place, rather than to determined contents. At least according to the model outlined above, this way may be traced back to the intertwining between active and passive components of *aisthesis*. The passive component is attested by the fact that we purely sense (that) something (hits the senses, is there for us, in its being or in its appearing). The active component is attested by the fact that we feel ourselves (somehow attuned), that is to say that we enjoy our participation to the relationship, or better we feel rewarded (in the case of positive, syntonic experiences) or disgusted and repulsed (in the case of negative, dystonic experiences)⁵.

Unfortunately, at least at the moment, the expectation about this requirement is frustrated. The impression that one gets from the current state of Everyday Aesthetics is that it provides, as respects to the everyday, a mainly passive conception of aesthetic *perception* as such, so that that reflectivity which is nevertheless invoked by its advocates seems to be projected onto the aesthetic rather than immanent in *aisthesis*. All this happens when we attempt to establish the criteria of the aesthetic in the everyday by individuating, either in continuity or discontinuity with the aesthetic in art, characters that would be detected (hence: passively) in the content of perceptual experience. An extreme case is Haapala (2005), who bases the analysis of the aesthetic in the everyday on a general state of lacking that would be felt by a purely receptive subject, by configuring, in this way, a sort of “aesthetics of reaction”. Nevertheless, generally speaking this typology includes all those who assume a substantially contemplative attitude towards everyday experience, an attitude which, after all, is borrowed from Fine Arts’ ideological system and shaped by the typically modern theory of perception meant as reception of

⁵ Only by emphasizing the relational character of this intertwining we will avoid the risk of misunderstanding its active component in a subjectivist sense. The fact that we feel ourselves must be considered as the articulation of a sense of participation to the expressive side of experience, as the grasping of the key we tune ourselves to, and not as the personal fulfillment for an alleged self-affirmation. As *aisthesis* and not as *noesis*, the aesthetic still has a “pathic” connotation that unfortunately modern tradition downplays by reducing it to mere passivity.

sense data. In these cases, what prevails is a conception that reduces the aesthetic to a quality, or to a set or cluster of qualities, without challenging the “constative” matrix of this attitude towards the object’s or event’s qualities. But then it becomes hard to see a substantial (not only presumed) difference from the aestheticizing paradigm of consumption that is embodied by alienated activities.

In order to overcome these bottlenecks, we need to promote a review of the perception theory underlying Everyday Aesthetics based on a model that could combine passive and active vectors in the field of *aisthesis*, making in this way the dialectical nexus between immediacy and mediation more consistent. If Everyday Aesthetics does not pursue all this and limits itself to invoking reflectivity (of an exclusively noetic, never aesthetic kind), it runs the risk of becoming a justificationist ideology of aestheticized reality, since it investigates everyday experience starting from that passivity of the aesthetic, which is the strength of the worst forms of aestheticization, that reduce the user to an aesthetic consumer who is adapted to the system.

Moreover, unlike what completely negative interpretations of this kind suggest, aestheticization as a whole is actually a complex phenomenon. It is true that the devices through which our reality appears aestheticized are such that they predispose the user to welcome the contents that have been expressly designed in order to orientate consumption in specific directions. But in order to do so, aestheticization cannot be based on a principle of mere passivization of the subject, at least from the perceptive point of view. The subject must be gratified through consumption, must be involved and immersed in the aesthetic relationships that are produced: he/she must indeed sense, but he/she must also feel himself/herself. Aestheticization can become negative not for the ways it shapes the forms that are sensed, but for the violence it is able to use on the forms through which an individual feels himself/herself. All this is proven by the same evolution of commercial strategies that, starting from experiential marketing, had to increasingly deal with more and more refined and sophisticated forms of critical-reflective consumption⁶. The pervasive capacity of the aesthetic to affect the root of behaviours that would seem adopted according to non-aesthetic value systems (eco-

⁶ On the nexus between aestheticization of everyday life and consumption, see Paterson (2006).

sustainable production, ethical fashion, fair trading...) is as great as indubitable. In other words, it almost seems like it is exactly aestheticization that opens up the perspective of an Everyday Aesthetics:

the tendency to aestheticize expresses itself by increasingly intensifying the forms of everyday life and equipping them with a dimension of meaning that appeals to the imagination and sensual desire. Objects of everyday life break out of their anonymous functionality and are profiled as forms, as staged, and in this way encourage the projecting, dialogical exchange of the process of aesthetic experience. (Nielsen 2005: 67)

When it simply opposes aestheticization as logic, Everyday Aesthetics turns a blind eye to this element, which, on the contrary, is qualifying for its programme since it actually triggers it. It is not coincidental that both of them rely on the valorisation of the reflectivity of the aesthetic. The fact that the aesthetic-reflective intensification can be experimented outside the domain of art justifies the research carried out by Everyday Aesthetics, while the fact that it is potentially the keystone of everyday life experience determines the pervasive logic of aestheticization. In other words, it is in the same root of *aisthesis*' specific dynamics that Everyday Aesthetics blends in with, and hence does not avoid, aestheticization as logic.

But, then, why does the above addressed refusal, repression attitude take place? Two plausible reasons have just been outlined. The first is a scarce awareness of the perception model incorporated by Everyday Aesthetics as a sub-discipline. All this happens when, unfortunately way too often, the everyday aesthetician looks for distinctive properties or even ascribes the determination of the aesthetic value of the everyday to elements which aren't properly aesthetic-sensorial elements, in the light of a subordination to the modern cognitivist conception of perception as mere passivity. These are the cases in which Everyday Aesthetics ends up with mere descriptions of objects and events *ad libitum*, whose properties are presumed to be sensed neutrally, and hence without a qualification in the sphere of *aisthesis*. The second reason, which is close to the first one, is an ideological reduction of aestheticization-related perception to mere passivity aimed at consumption, as if the *potentiality*, at least, of a reflective intensification in perception wasn't still an intrinsic character of the aesthetic.

In both cases, Everyday Aesthetics disappoints the expectations it raises. Not necessarily (or not only) because of a deficit on the theo-

retical level, but (also) because of a misunderstanding of current everyday aesthetic practices. These, in fact, exactly because they emerge in an aestheticized context, cannot be adequately described if the pre-structural elements that are implanted into them by an aesthetically oriented design are not taken into account. Today we are widely trained to the reflectivity of *aisthesis* exactly thanks to the devices that populate our everyday environment. We are oriented towards aesthetic value more than ever before. The point is that such aesthetic value can be regressive or emancipatory. It is regressive if it ignores its underlying dynamics, but also if it represses the logic that it follows. It is emancipatory if it nourishes the reflectivity which is immanent in *aisthesis*, to the extent that it fosters the perceiver's awareness of the aesthetic condition of his/her own everyday life.

In conclusion, it can be said that Everyday Aesthetics should challenge itself by dealing with aestheticization through the elaboration of an adequate theory of perception. Therefore, the preliminary task to achieve in order to build an incisive Everyday Aesthetics is exactly – overturning Leddy's argument (2012: 210) – “to see how appreciating the neatness of one's room, the tastiness of a home-cooked dinner, or the look of one's garden” *is actually a function* of aestheticization, although it cannot be reduced to it.

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