Abstract

The thesis inquires on the aesthetics of everyday life. It explores the topic from several angles. From one end I try to uncover what constitutes the everyday and how can we recognise aesthetic experiences in the daily. From here on I look into the workings of the aesthetic experience and the role of the spectator. To bring forward some key concepts I use a case study — a short essay from Aldous Huxley. This theoretical part is supported with an exploration of my previous work and empirical examples of possible aesthetics of the everyday.

The core of the theoretical reasoning is built upon linguistics, reception aesthetics and Dewey’s notion of the aesthetic experience. To construct my own view of the aesthetics of the everyday I employ the fore mentioned theories and take some of the key views alongside the idea of is-ness, a
term strongly tied to awareness, rehash them and infuse them with my own ideas.

Besides this pragmatic portion of the work, the thesis explores the subject from a more poetic point of view. The examples of possible aesthetic experiences in the everyday offer a more subtle view on the topic. The research is further explored through imagery that constitutes another integral part of my practice.

Volume I, which is comprised by word based research it is extended in Volume II, a photo book of images that are either part of my research material or actual examples of the aesthetics of the everyday. Volume III which cannot be contained in a book format should be developed as an exhibition and conclude this part of the research into the aesthetic of the everyday. This last volume is yet to be realised.

**Keywords:** everyday aesthetics, reception aesthetics, awareness, everyday, mundane, semiotics
VOLUME I
Aesthetics of the Everyday / Aesthetics of the Mundane
The
Master thesis for Master of Arts

Aesthetics of the Everyday / Aesthetics of the Mundane

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Thank you mom and dad (Ďarka and Ludvík Čuček Gerbec) for introducing me to coffee. If I, as a child, wouldn’t get to eat the foam off the cappuccino before my juice, I wouldn’t pick up coffee drinking later in my life. A habit that in my particular case proved to become a source of inspiration. If it wouldn’t be for your love of coffee, I wouldn’t have learned to cherish this little moments.

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¹ FTW
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Dictionary definitions

everyday
[ˈɛvrɪdeɪ, ɛvrɪˈdeɪ]

adjective

1. happening or used every day; daily
   "everyday chores like shopping and housework"

synonyms:
daily, day-to-day, quotidian; rare: diurnal, circadian

"the everyday demands of a baby"
2. commonplace
   "everyday drugs like aspirin"

synonyms:
commonplace, ordinary, common, usual, regular, familiar, conventional, run-of-the-mill, typical, standard, stock, plain, workaday; household, domestic, family unexceptional, unremarkable;

antonyms: unusual

adverb

1. each day; daily
   "I get up at six every day"

mundane
[ˈmʌndɪn, mʌndɪn]

adjective

1. lacking interest or excitement; dull
   "his mundane, humdrum existence"
synonyms:
- humdrum, dull, boring, tedious, monotonous, tiresome, wearisome, prosaic, unexciting, uninteresting, uneventful, unvarying, unvaried, unremarkable, repetitive, repetitious, routine, ordinary, everyday, day-to-day, quotidian, run-of-the-mill, commonplace, common, workaday, usual, pedestrian, customary, regular, normal; unimaginative, banal, hackneyed, trite, stale, platitudinous;
- informal: typical, vanilla, hacky; rare: banausic

"the mundane aspects of daily life"

antonyms:
- extraordinary, imaginative

2. of this earthly world rather than a heavenly or spiritual one

"according to the Shinto doctrine, spirits of the dead can act upon the mundane world"

synonyms:
- earthly, worldly, terrestrial, material, temporal, secular, non-spiritual, fleshly, carnal, sensual; rare: sublunary

"the mundane world"
Manifesto

Object of investigation

In our day to day life we do not pay attention to every single detail and let many moments pass unnoticed. We learn to overlook what has become part of the routine and only become attentive if something extraordinary happens. I am interested in exploring aesthetic experiences of moments, situations and activities that could pass as boring or uninteresting. I am interested in situations that are not integral parts of a full experience. I am not interested in the obviously aesthetic. My search is for the passable, the small, the non integral.

It is worth mentioning that my understanding of the everyday aesthetic is my own, for this reason I will provide an insight into what I consider everyday or better put — mundane.
My intention is not to bring the everyday and the art into the same scope, instead I intend to bring forward the aesthetics of the former. Furthermore I do not seek to explore the aesthetic value of everyday objects. For this reason I do not intend to analyse the aesthetics of mundane landscapes, mundane objects, weather phenomena, food or food displays or any other objectifiable instances of day to day life. I am not interested in possible aesthetic objects but rather the aesthetic experiences that can be triggered in any sorts of environments. Meaning that an everyday, mundane aesthetic experience can occur in ascetic places with little or no new input or even in places which are loaded with aesthetic objects, places that are designed to trigger such experiences. But in that case I am not interested in the aesthetic experience that evolves from such objects. I am rather interested in the experiences that emerge from activities that we have already internalised and are familiar with; concluding that an everyday experience can occur inside an art museum or gallery, but is by no means bound to any specific place.

2 The word object is here understood in its broader ontological sense, meaning that it defines all typologies of an object, relating its meaning to everything except the subject. Object — in the way I will be using it; include a wide variety of tangible and non tangible entities.

3 The word object is in this instance used in its narrow meaning.
The distinction between the mundane and originally aesthetic has to lie beyond the object’s appearance and intention. From which follows that the experiences I am searching for are not triggered by the object’s intended use or inherent beauty, but rather an instance that is brought forward from an internal realisation of the aesthetic value of the entire experience.

Finding a general rule on what could be perceived as the aesthetic trigger or what would be valued in such a manner would be beyond scope and in my belief impossible. It would not only require a complete definition of aesthetics, but also a universal formula for generating aesthetic experiences. It would be an unachievable task that would remove the whole beauty of the aesthetic experience and its daunting non universal occurrence. It is a task that would bring the whole discussion on the aesthetics to an end, while simultaneously removing the aesthetic out of the debate.

Instead of following this rabbit hole I will build upon what has been already said on the subject and will try to shine light on the aforementioned phenomena with examples and analysis.

Part of my research will be built upon rhetorics and theory, while the other part of it will be based in practice. As part of the investigation I want to dig into the theoretical of the aesthetic of the mundane and upon that build the artistic
expression which should resonate back on the former influencing it, challenging it, possibly transforming it and in the end reinforce it.
Defining the everyday/mundane

I

To begin of the inquiry into the aesthetic of the everyday/mundane it would be wise to have a common understanding of this two terms.

The dictionary definitions in the beginning of the text are there for tautological reason. They serve to demonstrate a common understanding of the words and to create an initial consensus. Concurrently they show how imprecise this definitions are and the extent of the divergence of more nuanced meanings; ultimately reaffirming the need for enunciation of my usage of the words.
Let start with the more cumbersome word — *everyday*. Its umbrella definition encompasses a variety of meanings, subsequently generating a multitude of understanding of the aesthetic of everyday. Taken quite literally it would be the aesthetics of phenomena happening on quotidian basis. From activities we have to perform, like eating, to occurrences that are present at all time, for example weather. It would be about the quotidian too, making life rhythm part of it as well.

I am in search of exploring the sphere of the everyday that is not literally following the world, but rather the occasion, situation that we consider common enough to label as everyday but are not necessarily performed on a day to day basis.

My interest follows this kind of understanding to a certain degree, but instead of seeing the everyday from an objective lens, I am drawn to the type of everyday that a person defines as their quotidian. I personally do not have a tight and repetitive schedule, my weeks differ from one to another. Nonetheless I am still able to find instances I would file under this label. Work on this text has become part of my routine, even though I work intermittently on it and in different spaces. That means that I am not interested in an orthodox daily experience but rather what we consider part of our everyday, even if it does not repeat on a daily basis.

This brings me to the second, less cumbersome word — *mundane*. This word is irrevocably less transformative, its
meaning is more strictly set into its own. It defines something as unmistakably unremarkable, common, usual, banal, boring, uneventful and unexciting.

The word is loaded with meaning. It brings into conversation a history tied to the city, the bourgeoisie, but at the same time defines the proletariat, the working class as mundane. It is a word that can drag with itself a political, economical struggle and as such it acts against its nature. But word politics aside it describes perfectly, especially in connection with the (word) everyday, what I am after — the mundane everyday experience that often goes unnoticed and is mostly discarded as commonplace.

The aesthetics of the everyday, the aesthetics of the mundane are for my needs defined as the aesthetic of the occasions of passing moments, passing situation, passing compositions. Instances that in their recurrence amount to nothing more than sensory white noise. For example how experiencing the home neighbourhood on a clear day with a clear mind can suddenly pop out. Not because something changed in the landscape, but because re-living the same space with the right awareness brings the aesthetic out of the mundane.

I am in no way searching for the aesthetic of unmistakably beautiful. I might touch upon the same subjects, but I do not intend to search for the aesthetic of weather,
landscape, food, common objects⁴, etc. I might observe the same phenomena and I might find that some rely on similar instances, but I will not argue or dissect their aesthetics, at least not their direct aesthetic value. It could be argued that their aesthetics are based on the everyday, but they are not about the mundane experience of it. Their aesthetics are based upon extraordinary experiences, on instances that surpass the mundane.

The exploration of this kind of aesthetic leads to a search of the artistic value of extraordinary instances that are supposed to overcome the typical experience and move the person with the unusual.

This is the case when weather affects human perception, either through sublime or haunting experiences. When the sheer power of nature transposes something in our perception and thus triggers an aesthetic experience. Or in cases when the aesthetic experience of food is derived, not from the common, but from the exceptional; when a meal is carefully orchestrated to trigger taste buds and/or visually stun the eater.

In opposition to this my search is not for the sublime of this magnitude or the orchestrated or designed⁵, my search is for experiences that follow the logic of the mundane. I am

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⁴ The word object is in this instance used in its narrow meaning.

⁵ Be it visually stunning design or a marvel of functionality.
searching for experiences that happen in dull weather, in moments of repose from the extraordinary, for moments when a croissant you have been eating daily is suddenly elevated. Not by a change in taste or pastry, not because something different has happened. But because the same has happened, because the same croissant has suddenly been recognised for what it is. A moment in time of mild enjoyment a moment of self awareness, when an aesthetic experience can occur, not triggered by the unexpected, but by elevating itself from the mundane.
This brings us to a split in what an aesthetic experience is. On one hand we can pursue the aesthetic, beautiful and sublime in search for the cherry on top, as in the instance of the extraordinary. On the other hand we can follow an ascetic approach an almost ritual, spiritual search for the beauty from within.

In a sense we could start talking about western and eastern philosophy, essentially moving away from the synthesis. For a reminder on the origin on western art culture, I want to go way back and start from what could constitute some sort of origin of the western artistic tradition. Long before the idolisation and fetishisation of art objects and creation has occurred, western art practice followed what is understood as mimesis, a practice that has had a long standing tradition well into the 18th and 19th century maintaining a position in the art world all to this day. From the early cave paintings in Chauvet, France — capturing the life of the time — to realistic still life masteries by the Dutch painter Willem Claesz Heda. Portraits, landscapes, religious and secular motives all transfigured from reality to surface, with attention to detail or with more
expressive approaches like Cezanne’s, all represent art forms that try to reproduce what is in front of our eyes.

Humans have a strong aesthetic connection to nature and natural beauty. We drove ourselves so far to decode and codify natural laws into mathematics that we attach it to the aesthetic appreciation of composition or structure. We have used the Fibonacci sequence to unlock patterns in all sorts of natural occurrences and at the same time used it to create compositions in all sorts of mediums.

Humans are indeed great machines for pattern recognition, we are astonishingly good at finding resemblances in the most unimaginable circumstances. For example our brains are hard-wired to recognise human faces, hence we can very easily distinguish one just from simple three dots, a fact that we have been exploiting in comics and cartoon drawings; so efficiently that when the spacecraft Viking 1 took images of the surface of Mars, many recognised a distinct face-like mountain in the region of Cydonia from which a number of speculations surfaced.

This fascination and our remarkable ability to recognise patterns is something that allows us to find the beauty in nature. Finding forms that follow some aesthetic formula and framing nature into what essentially is a codified mathematical composition is what we have been doing from the start of our collective artistic practice.
Mimesis is the practice of capturing nature’s beauty into a painting or sculpture (or in any other form) and thus creating an artwork. Even though the belief is that such a work of art is a mimesis, a copy of external influences, the only way for us to codify and decode a work of art is through our internal sense of aesthetic; which we could cynically attribute to our power of pattern recognition and love for mathematics⁶.

To stay on topic, I will not deliberate whether the cynical understanding of aesthetic is the correct viewpoint or not, I will assume that we might have a deeper and less pragmatic reason to consider something as such. Otherwise we would end up into an existential predicament and have to either resign into the mechanical nature of existence or come out of this inquiry maintaining the status quo. Never come out of this inquiry with different beliefs for anyone. I will safely assume that aesthetic appreciation is set somewhere between a psychological phenomenon and expression of the soul. If we now return back to mimesis and nature as sublime, we can start seeing that the aesthetic experience is not something bestowed upon us solely from the outside but it is rather a synthesis of our inner being and external influences. This shift of perception puts us in a bit of a unique position, allowing a less

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⁶ Here we could open the discussion if mathematics is actually a natural occurring phenomena and resides in the structure of the universe or is a tool we have created to facilitate our understanding of the world.
pragmatic understanding of the aesthetic experience. It opens the possibility that an aesthetic experience would come exclusively from within.
Ordinary
Extraordinary

In the beginning every experience is extraordinary.

"Whether we recognize it as such or not, everydayness is what we invent through the way we conduct our activities"

I have chosen to divide everyday experiences in two main categories — ordinary and extraordinary. I have chosen this pair of words to describe the two main types of experiences we have, especially regarding the everyday. Instead of extraordinary I could have chosen a myriad of other words expressing superlative qualities or uniqueness and singularity. There are certainly types of experiences that deserve to be described as exceptional, marvellous, miraculous, rare, uncanny, or peculiar. But those will never resemble an ordinary event.

On the other hand extraordinary could designate experiences that are extra ordinary — very ordinary, but this is not the case. The prefix extra denotes something additional. Something out of the ordinary used for experiences that are close to the ordinary but hold something additional, thus becoming exceptional. I chose this pair of words exactly because extraordinary is linguistically tied to the ordinary and thus evokes it every time.

Both the ordinary and the everyday are peculiar phenomena. Neither of them can exist without repetition and both are born out of chaos. It is ironical that the extraordinary preludes the ordinary in the course of life but is linguistically born from the later. The ordinary can come to fruition only through the appropriation of the extraordinary. Only when we are able to internalise the new experiences, recognise the patterns and make them ours, can we truly speak of the
ordinary. The same is true for the everyday. Only through the appropriation and internalisation can we alienate ourselves from the chaotic and focus our awareness elsewhere. “[… ] everyday is the site of struggle between alienation and appropriation […]” The everyday becomes the ordinary, part of the repetitive and any deviation from it can potentially become extraordinary.

Since our early childhood we appropriate everything new. A small kid would find anything mundane to be exciting and only through time learn to alienate the enthusiasm. A newborn would find car keys extraordinary, but the more we appropriate our surroundings more things become ordinary.

QUESTION:
Is being aware of the daily a brake through the ordinary, and the experience becomes automatically extraordinary?

To better understand this issue I want to consider what makes our everyday — ordinary; or how do we appropriate something to become such. Haapala in his text *On the Aesthetics of the Everyday* introduces the term strangeness and familiarity,


which helps to bring out the distinction between objects and activities that we consider quotidian and our actual everyday — “everydayness is not a property or aggregate of these things; it inheres rather in the way they are part of manifold lived experience.”

Sheringham talks of alienation and appropriation; I would say that the mechanism of making something part of our everyday certainly lies in the ability to appropriate, to make something familiar. That allows us to alienate our attention away from it and go through the day more efficiently.

It is as Haapala points out that: “when familiarity has been broken by something new, then we start to look at things.” This is definitely true when we are experiencing something for the first time. “We are also particularly attentive to its aesthetic potentiality. Let me return to the experience we have in a foreign city. We pay attention to the most trivial-looking things—like the color of public transport vehicles, the color of telephone boxes, the sound of the metro cars, the smell of the sea, etc. We are much more sensitive to these sorts of features in strange surroundings than at home. In one sense of


the word *aesthetic*, strangeness creates suitable setting for aesthetic considerations."\(^{12}\)

On the contrary an ordinary experience, for example the peaceful anticipation of turning the next page in a book, would not trigger our awareness. We would not become suddenly attentive because of the anticipation. While holding the finger under the page, ready to turn it around in a moment of repose it is only our own internal realisation that can trigger an aesthetic appreciation. Sitting in the usual spot, with the light hitting the page, the familiar feel of the book and the time reserved for reading is what makes the experience. If in this moment we become aware of the beauty of it, the experience is not suddenly estranged, it is still familiar and appropriated.

As long as the aesthetic experience comes from the ordinary experience itself and not as the result of the sudden awareness (as a new thing) I would not consider it extraordinary.

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How to identify an aesthetic experience in the everyday/mundane

To identify an aesthetic experience in the mundane we need to recognise what are the mechanisms that allow it to transgress the boundaries of the unnoticed.

To follow on the ordinary this event should not transgress in a manner of becoming a pinnacle, an extraordinary instance of the mundane experience, rather it should come from it.
To help illustrate it, I want to use a croissant as an example, or better put, the experience of eating the said croissant. If we analyse only the food item, then we could easily start an entire discussion on what constitutes a perfect croissant, but that would be completely irrelevant for the experience of having one.

If we quickly try to remember a number of our personal encounters with the pastry, we can easily establish on which occasions the croissant was good, bad or average. This kind of experiences are completely relative and are far from what we could consider an objectively perfect croissant.

From here on we could easily establish an aesthetic experience for the individual, which would stem from the excellence of the product. In this way we would not establish an absolute scale, but rather create a number of personal relative scales of enjoyable consumption and so bringing the tasting experience to a non universal scale of aesthetic value. As long as you have not had a better croissant any improvement on the best you had, could bring you to new aesthetic

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13 Here I would like to put a big asterisk on the fact of an objectively true statement regarding taste or pastry. It would be very debatable what would be the culmination of the de facto croissant. We can find some very compelling arguments that would put the French method as the only valid, but even so that would be hard to justify. The food is in the end widespread and has been adopted in various places, where it has most probably taken several forms of modification. Even just something like sugar content can be contested and would be judged by personal preferences. Again, ‘objectively’ has to be taken with a grain of salt.
gratification. Needless to add, personal taste in food affects the aesthetic value of any dish.

Even though encountering on an everyday basis an above personal average pastry would result into an aesthetic appreciation, this would as well define the mundane aspect of the experience.

I find it interesting that contrary to expectation, we do not endlessly seek an increasingly better croissant, but rather tend to find one that suits us. I would assume that we find it on the first instance pleasurable, maybe it even produces an excess in aesthetic value. After time we appropriate the experience and then is no longer extraordinary. The experience becomes part of the everyday. The pursuit of a better replacement comes to a halt and we stick with the usual and keep returning to it. This new experience through its repetition and appropriation holds a certain inherent aesthetic value that over time normalises itself and becomes mundane yet still enjoyable.

Take a moment and picture this mundane croissant. Imagine a place where you would regularly get the said pastry. A shop you know is reliable and never lets you down; or even better imagine having the habit of eating a croissant every Sunday morning with your coffee. I chose Sunday because it fits in the weekly routine but being part of the weekend (generally) gives ample time for self reflection.
Having the scene set — think of the first bite; how your tasting buds are activated and the sweet flaky pastry fills your mouth with taste. How the soft dough gives way each bite you make and the buttery flavour gives you that feeling of comfort and nurture. Let this simple act, you have had so many times, come forward. Try to see the beauty that lies behind an ordinary act. And savour the moment for what it is.

This might bring the experience forward to your awareness and it may give you a new look — triggering something in you the next time you bite into a croissant (or other type of pastry, you might enjoy). By this I made you, the reader, and myself more attentive to this act, which may break the regular rhythm and trigger an aesthetic experience. In a sense making it obvious might have taken some of the mundane out.

What I would like to find out is how can we become aware of instances like this without external information. How to become aware of a mundane experience, while it happens and enjoy it? Or if we put it in different words, what triggers our senses into becoming aware of the aesthetic in the mundane.
Personal
Photography could be described as the ultimate mimetic art. The nature of the photographic medium requires that the portrayed stands in front of the lens. What the photographer and the camera are seeing is then effortlessly reproduced on to the photographic surface — be it emulsion or sensor. This physical process is then translated, transformed into a series of shades, either monochromatic or in colour; depending on the type of the photographic process.

This makes the photographic medium immediate in its transfiguration from the seen into the portraying. It uses an analogue physical processes to our biological eye generating, an image that to us results uncanny — like a nearly perfect replica of what has been in front of the lens and our eyes. Back in the
day the effortless mechanical nature of the reproduction of the seen opened up questions on whether photography belongs amongst other art forms.

What today might seem as an odd debate made a lot of sense during the emergence of the medium. Painters soon became replaced in the craft of realistic portrayal; but photography still had to prove that it is not just simple copying, but rather curated framing. When a photographer would set to make a picture it seemed that capturing the scenes was merely a mechanical operation with little thinking involved. Over time photographers proved that different minds had a different eye and hence different styles.

The medium steadily proved to be just one of the ways for expression and additionally cemented itself as one of the mediums to be used by artists. The ways in which photography is used now, greatly overcame what could be described as pure photography on the likes of the group f/64; a group that chased a relatively mechanical reproduction of the subject, while expressing themselves through framing and chosen subjects. Since the early days many devoted their creative process exclusively to the photographic medium and through decades we had many styles emerge. But in time artists emerged who integrate the photographic in their work as only a part of their process and expression.
My personal artistic background is in photography and I have trained my eye to see the world in a certain way. This means that my way of looking at the world — especially for the purpose of image making — is most probably different from other’s.

Photographers in general train their eyes to find the aesthetic in all sorts of environments, frequently transforming unlikely scenes into surprisingly aesthetic images. The job of a commercial product photographer is to find a way to make an object look attractive regardless of how it is perceived in situ. Or better said, find out the aesthetic potential an object holds. This is achieved with the correct lighting and framing. The photographer may place the object in a specific scene and through that find a way to elevate it.

A specific genre of photography prides itself in finding the aesthetic in the daily urban environment. Street photography uses the urban landscape with or without people to create aesthetic images. Surprisingly the subject matter on the images might be of a completely unaesthetic nature, or at least unlikely aesthetic.

My own interest in the photographic expression had some of the same elements of portraying the seemingly banal as aesthetic. Still to this day my photographic background affects the way I see the things around me.
A look into my previous work

Couple With Dogs

In this work I explore the limits of what essentially is one image. The project deals with the limits of photography and its representational qualities. The importance of the original has been relinquished to favour a democratic relationship between iterations. Every version that I have made so far comes from one single photograph. Incidentally the same image has become part of the multitude of iterations, leaving behind only a question of which was the first one and most importantly, does it even matter?
My primary motive of the exploration was exactly this search of the importance of authenticity in storytelling. This experimentation was built on the foundation of an image with a somewhat mundane theme, which floats somewhere between an afternoon stroll and an instance on the riverbank in a moment of general disinterest.

The experience of the subjects (the people and the dogs) portrayed could be of an enjoyable nature and in some case, especially if they are looking forward to the activity, somewhat extraordinary. On the other hand it could be watered down in routine and be perceived as quotidian. It could be argued that this kind of experience finds its own aesthetics in the ritualistic nature of the behaviour.

The experience and aesthetic value of the act could be discussed at length, but it would be beyond scope as the spectator finds himself only witnessing this act and by extension never experiencing it first hand. The image in its iterations offers different views on what essentially is a very similar voyeuristic experience. It always ends up into an observation of anonymous subjects on a stroll. Even in the variation with the empty riverbank the spectator is left in anticipation — waiting to experience yet another iteration of a non eventful everyday occurrence.

The chosen theme for the image falls well within the conceptual background. Considering that any other such event,
or better put encounter, could easily happen to anyone in real life, potentiates the multitude and the similarity of the iterations. The numerable variations make it evident that the images are as authentic as memory. It is a reconstructed reality that more or less adheres to what has happened and might happen again or has happened to someone else in a similar manner. The act can be relived in any number of ways, with more or less detail, with a shorter or longer narrative. In addition as in memory, the details can be added or removed form the act or experience.

It should be observed which aesthetic components of the image made it suitable to be used for my work and why did I choose this particular image and not another one. For this I will have to work from memory and try to reconstruct what attracted me to the image in the first place.

I have taken the original photo several years ago and have only some faint recollection of the action. I cannot say with certainty what made me frame it and what attracted me in the scene. There were probably some visual clues at the time that triggered my photographic muscle. All of which I think is irrelevant for the state of the project now. I would like to point to an additional moment of a conscious decision — the time I have chosen the image and began experimenting with it.

It had to be later, probably a year or two, from when I first snapped the image and the time I had rediscovered it. I
have been digitalising older negatives and in between many of the images that I have scanned, this one stood out. I do remember thinking there was something hauntingly beautiful in it. I believe the way the light falls in the image attracted me, but I do remember I felt some sort of great satisfaction in realising that the photograph is inherently mundane and lacks any real drama, or if you wish — story.

I immediately started fiddling around with it, trying some colour correction and cropping and all sorts of other ways of toying with it. Nothing came immediately of it. More time had to pass and only then I made different artworks with it. I still regularly come back once in a while to observe it or work on it. The more I got to know the image, the more I realised how common it is. It became evident that the story portrayed was some sort of distant memory, a remote event that either went down in one way or another. This kind of thought opened possibilities for it to be retold in any possible manner. The image for me became some sort of reference, some idea that can be retold every time differently. Like some sort of mythological tale, with the same massage, even though the story changes greatly from iteration to iteration.

The memories that we call upon from our minds are not perfect and tend to be different from what really happened. This transformation and reduction happens due the nature of our brain. It is a process that we have only limited control of.
In the case of this work though, I consciously choose the ways I transform the pictorial surface and I decided what to omit or add to the story. This way I created iterations that constitute only a part of the story or variations with missing elements. The *truth* behind the different narratives is reduced to an enhanced memory that can be selectively called upon.

Moving deeper into the project, we can observe the theme of it in detail. What would constitute the essence of the images? For this, I think, we have to first answer the position of the iterations and elements of the image. I perceive them, and this is as well the way I construct them, all democratically equivalent. This means any of the parts could be exchanged. The setting of the photograph could be swapped for a similar one or completely removed. The subjects could be exchanged, removed. Any iteration of a more or less similar complete scene\(^{14}\) could easily produce a similar voyeuristic pleasure. Similarly the encounter of any single element could produce a very similar experience. The disassembled or faked reconstructions of the same story are all valid versions of it, concluding that the aesthetic experience could be tied or triggered by any or all of the elements.

This view of the project can lead to a radical version of it, when chance and luck could bring together an experience in the real world for any passerby to be perceived in the same

\(^{14}\) The background and subjects.

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manner as any part of the artwork. I would really say that the aesthetic experience in this work does not lie in the pictorial, in the composition, rather in the fact that a mundane experience viewed in the right manner can be seen as aesthetic. Thus coming full circle and re-questioning the importance of the image, reproduction and its special place in authenticity.

examples???
This project, similarly to the former, explores the representational limits of a photograph. It casts an interesting reflection upon the semiotical nature of modern digital phone photography. From the beginning of the medium information that was mechanically transferred could be found only on the pictorial surface. But with the evolution of photography from film to digital and especially with the emergence of phone photography, the image file now holds extra metadata that determines the images even further.

Alongside the representation on the pictorial surface, every photograph, due to causality, has a physical tie to the place of origin. The image is the result of events happening in front of the camera at a specific time and place. The photons bounce from the objects in front of the lens and impress the image on the digital sensor or film.

The link between image and origin is perceived as weak, in spite of the fact that the former is the consequence of the later; just after that they become two separate entities. The camera creates distance between them. “The presence of the
original is the prerequisite of the concept of authenticity.” In this sense the lens alienates the portrayed from the image. And even though we know that the photographed and the image had to be present in the same spacetime we view them as separate.

It is easy to pinpoint the location of origin if the photograph holds any recognisable details. For example a picture of the colosseum or Eiffel Tower is instantly connected to an exact place. But in the case of an image lacking any representative element or lacking anything remarkable of the location where it was taken — we perceive it as location-less. If instead of framing the entire colosseum the photographer decides to frame just a detail, and a very generic one, then the photo could have been taken anywhere.

The emergence of satellite technology allows us to embed GPS coordinates in the image file of the exact location of origin. Most contemporary phones have this capability incorporated and usually the function is turned on by default. The additional metadata makes the connection between the location/space and image stronger. It reaffirms the authenticity of its origin. We still perceive the photograph as a separate unit, but this makes it unmistakably linked to the location and time of its creation. With this kind of additional information

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attached even the potentially abstract image, like a pocket photo — an essentially black image, has an undeniable tie to the location of origin.

I have taken this feature of phone photography as an advantage. To form a conflict between the pictorial surface and the semiotic of the image, I have confronted the classic indexicality of a photograph with its new improved semiotic connection.

I have done this in a manner which puts the pictorial aspect of the photograph to a minimum, thus relinquishing the classic indexical nature of it while still preserving it in the form of GPS coordinates. I achieve this with images of the sky, which are most of the time an almost flat blue surface. A photograph of a clear blue sky is evidently hard to pinpoint to any place and could theoretically be taken anywhere in the world. This is exactly where the project is extended through a poetic addition.

Contrasting the hard, logical and pragmatic perspective questioning the possibilities of the representational in the image. The relentless iterations of the sky democratizes any single view of this omnipresent entity. “By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.”16 The blue sky bridges, both directly and

metaphorically any location in the world. The images that were taken in specific places with their cryptic GPS coordinates, even though taken thousands kilometres apart, all look similar. Making the viewer aware any places on earth is connected through the sky. This blue non-entity above our heads is something that all of us share.

A ubiquitous entity that stays with us day and night. We all see the same Sun and we all see the same stars. But what truly is the sky? Certainly the moon and the stars are astrological bodies deep in space. The blackness of the night is nothing else than the void of the Universe. But the blue sky is in a sense way closer to us than any of those bodies. The blue sky is a direct consequence of our atmosphere; so while what we see is scattered light, we undoubtedly look at our shared air. A gaseous mixture that we take for granted.

In the end the sky is a non-tangible entity. Its nature lies somewhere between a physical phenomenon, scattered photons, and the Universe out there. It is unequivocally a presence that we all share on Earth. We might tell that the air feels different from place to place, but even from that perspective we are aware that the atmosphere is a unified body. It is like a stirring pot of soup, with slight variances that are or will be stirred into the whole. So when we look up, we do look up at the same soup.
In respect to this our perception of the sky transcends this pragmatic notion and stretches beyond time itself. In a manner we are bound to say the sky we look at now is not the same as yesterday, even less so yesteryear. And in a sense is true. The second law of thermodynamics dictates that the Universe is in constant change, the entropy increases over time; making it more than evident that the sky is in a constant flux. But regardless of the changes it is still the same Universe. And to put this into perspective the changes that occurred during the existence of humankind are just a fraction of a fraction of the existence of everything.

It is with romantic eyes that we shall look at the sky. We can feel connected to everyone who has ever been gazing into infinity, at the stars, at the Sun and at the blue nothingness that is constantly and always above us. Everyone that has ever been born has glared out into the same space. There is nothing more unifying that the totality of the reality of the Universe we share. The sky is merely one way to reach out and grasp the vastness of it.

I have to pose the question: how does this project connect to the everyday? I would say that it would be apparent to anyone that the quotidian sky is as everyday as possible. It could be contested that the blue sky tends to represent good weather and a nice day, which in itself could be seen as extraordinary. But even aside this, there is no denying that the
work is penetrated throughout with the aesthetic of the mundane. This can be observed in other aspects of the project.

This collection of almost seamless surfaces, each similar to the other thrives on repetition, the lack of stimuli pushes the spectator to search for the minimal. The only pictorial aesthetic value to be found, lies in the uneventful blue surfaces. More to be enjoyed can be found beyond the visual in the poetic or theoretical nature of the work. While the semiotical question provokes a questioning — reasoning; I would say that the poetic part does resonate with older philosophies, with a sort of omnipresent truth we can find in ourselves. The connection to others, past or present, that can be felt through the sky, borders with theological and yet falls into the everyday and mundane thinking.
46°4'47" N 14°31'20" E
Googlescapes

This artwork deals with the concept of the simulacrum and hyperreality as defined by Baudrillard\textsuperscript{17}. By the time I started the project, Google Street View was still in the earlier phase, but it already started to expand further and further. I was fascinated that they planned to make a reproduction of all the streets they could and digitalise them so we would be able to roam through a virtual copy of reality.

The reproduction they embarked on ties really well with the theoretical background that photography brought forward. From the introspections that Walter Benjamin\textsuperscript{18} made, to the unique semiotical structure photography has, to the subverted nature of the simulation — as from the likes of the post-structuralist Baudrillard; photography, film, virtual reality and projects like Google Street View, all of them are shaping the way we perceive the world. Google made worldwide locations — that were before out of reach and hard to imagine — much closer to everyone. Obviously in a limited manner, but nevertheless they brought them closer.

\textsuperscript{17} In his book Simulacra and Simulation.

\textsuperscript{18} The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction
I tried to address the changes and our relation towards the reproduction and the reproduced. I also wanted to highlight the relation between the simulacra and the real. I decided to bring them together, to double them and to highlight the differences. The result is a superposition that is both the real and the simulacrum, while as well a new reality. None of the representations is wrong.

The big difference lies only in the presence. Googlescapes is a series of photographs, thus representing a reproduction, representation of the short lived meeting of the simulacra and its counterpart. It is thus a representation of a real event, which is gone after I take the photograph. The spectator is then presented with a simulacrum of the performance (the photograph). I would like to mention that this work evolved in another version, where the object of investigation becomes the gallery, where the work is presented. This revised version is titled Googlespace and projects the gallery space back onto itself. In this case the spectator experiences the hyperreal superposition instead of observing a reproduction of it.

Googlespace is in the case of the everyday and mundane, just remotely connected. I will rather focus on the preceding project — Googlescapes. For that I was limited with what has been mapped by Google. They use a very democratic

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19 Which can be found on Google Street View.
approach and try to present all the roads and streets with a 360° view many times along the way. This means that as long as they have mapped the places you have a fairly big option on choosing a position and view. There are obviously certain limitations, but in no accordance are those set for aesthetic purposes. The limitations are mostly because of legal or political reasons.

In this multitude of imagery I was able to choose whatever suited me the most. I have mostly chosen places that would have an everyday quality. I have avoided national parks or other landmarks and rather picked places that are part of urban or rural areas. While searching Google for potential image locations, I chose spots, I thought might work well visually with their projection on top of themselves. I have purposely picked up a few places which would probably have changed by the time I got there. But regardless of it I was not searching for the extraordinary.

The artwork does not deal with the everyday in a direct manner, but it brings the main theme forward with the help of the environment and technology that very quickly became part of the quotidian. I do not think that the reflection upon the simulacra and our relation to it would be considered everyday or mundane, but I would say that the mechanisms observed in the notion of the simulacra and its workings are coming from increasingly everyday activities.
The technologies that Baudrillard had in mind have become part of the daily routine and even more so. Our lives are embedded with relations to the digital; our interrelations are increasingly extended with the help of the digital. I would not say virtual as it seems that the two worlds are visibly merging and people are understanding more and more that there is no distinction between the realities happening online and offline. Our presence on the web has become intertwined with our reality offline. The relations we have with people face to face continue on the internet (i.e. Facebook), they are not suddenly an alternative. The online presence might reach further and behind some anonymity create distance, but when we are present as ourselves the relations are no more virtual than a phone call. The same extension goes for companies and places. The streets and places I have encountered online are the same I have photographed offline. Both have now become part of our daily.

\[20\] I think is fair to remark that online places without a real counterpart exist. It would be though unfair, regardless of their non tangible form, to call them virtual; because of the increasing amount of real interaction happening online it would be more honest to recognise them as and extension of reality instead. This realities are no more fictional than books.
Mechanics
I want to explore Aldous Huxley’s essay and his view on beauty to better understand the workings of aesthetics. The book is about his experience on mescaline, which shifts his perspective. As we will see it is situated in a quotidian environment and he brings forward art books as well. This offers an insightful perspective on how we view art and the everyday. We will see that all this is done with a shift of perspective.

*Doors of Perception* was first published 1954. Later editions come with the addendum of the essay *Heaven and Hell*.

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21 As a reminder, Huxley is the author of the well known novel *Brave New World*. 
The book and its contents had great influence outside the academic circles.\textsuperscript{22}

The book coincides with the emergence of the hippy culture. A massive movement that influenced an entire generation. We tend to connect the movement with \textit{Woodstock} and a young population riding the wave of the sexual revolution, but in reality the movement had a wider spectrum compared to what we tend to portray in popular media.

One of the key figures at the time was Timothy Leary. An interesting individual who for a while taught at Harvard. He is mostly known for his book \textit{Turn on, tune in, drop out}, a book that played an important role in the genesis of the hippy philosophy. But most importantly (for us), this person coming from an academic background of the \textit{west} had great hopes in altered states of consciousness. Leary and other intellectuals contrary to the extremely logical \textit{west} philosophy saw great potential in creating a balanced existence between rational and spiritual. He amongst others viewed LSD as a tool to expand the human mind. Much like meditation that can be used to clear our thoughts or certain mental exercises to improve our memory or painkillers that can help alleviate the pain and return our focus — they believe that LSD could be used to create a fresh look on the objective reality.

\textsuperscript{22} It is worth mentioning that the rock band The Doors named themselves after this essay.
Before the spread of the war on drugs in USA, many people, experimented with substances like LSD and mescaline. This pioneering individuals, especially people in academia took experimentation very seriously and they meticulously recorded such experiences. *Doors of Perception* precedes this boom of interest in psychotropic substances and might be one of the earlier works of this type and as such has been fairly influential. It has earned somewhat of a cult status.

Huxley’s choice for his journey, mescaline, is a drug with a long history. It is a naturally occurring substance found in certain plants and most notably in the cactus *peyote*. The cactus has been and still is consumed in rituals and is highly esteemed by some.

Psychedelic substances can generate a vast variety of responses, from euphoria and terror to profound experiences best described as spiritual or even religious. What type of trip someone will have, depends from person to person and a number of other factors.

Psychoactive substances will always have some predictable effects like enhanced colours, mood lift, changes in perception of time... Some of the effects can be negative, like nausea, stiff muscles... This differs from substance to substance...

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23 The term was coined by army scientists in USA in the 1950s. But has since been popularised and is widely used to describe a psychedelic experience/session. The term fits well as such experiences can quite well resemble a journey.
and the dosage taken. It is thus expected that the experience Huxley had would be out of the ordinary and most importantly with a shifted perception. On the other hand the setting in which he had the experience was ordinary and among familiar faces. We are thus observing the mundane objective reality through an altered perspective.

It is our own point of view on the world and personal experiences that defines the ways in which we judge it, create our values, aesthetic tastes, our view on the spiritual and the

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24 Effects that could occur during the influence of Peyote. Source: www.erowid.org; POSITIVE: feelings of insight, brightening of colours, closed and open eye visuals, mood lift, euphoria, increased giggling and laughing, increase in energy (stimulation), increased tactile sensation, happy, dreamy feelings, feelings of hope or rejuvenation, increased access to spiritual ideation; deep esoteric experiences; NEUTRAL: general change in consciousness (as with most psychoactives), loss of appetite, change in body temperature regulation, unusual thoughts and speech, unusual focus on either small details or large concepts; changes in meaning or significance of experiences, mild to extreme distractability, changes in perception of time, changes in perception of “reality”, changes in self control, unusual body sensations (facial flushing, chills, goosebumps, body energy), ego softening, pupil dilation, body tremors, urge to urinate (in early stages of experience), restlessness; NEGATIVE: (likelihood of negative side effects increases with higher doses), nausea and/or vomiting, chest and neck pain (in early stages of experience), shortness of breath, uncomfortable changes in body temperature (sweating/chills), confusion, difficulty concentrating, problems with activities requiring linear focus, difficulty communicating, inhibition of sex drive, insomnia, unpleasant or frightening visions, unwanted and overwhelming feelings, depression, anxiety, paranoia, fear, and panic.
objective nature. This changes from individual to individual, we all have a different world view.

The best way to find differences between shifting perspectives has to be through one set of eyes and two ways at looking at the world. Perception is an important factor in aesthetic evaluation. It is from the spectator’s point of view that an artwork and its emerging experience are evaluated. The aesthetic experience is of subjective nature and highly depends on the point of view of each individual.

In the upcoming observations we will have the opportunity to see a fresh view on some artworks and most importantly on a few daily, ordinary experiences. What is most striking is the connection between the two or if you want, in the way of seeing; To continue we should now dive into the experiences Huxley had; I will follow them chronologically through the book:

“The vase contained only three flowers-a full-blown Belie of Portugal rose, shell pink with a hint at every petal’s base of a hotter, flamier hue; a large magenta and cream-colored carnation; and, pale purple at the end of its broken stalk, the bold heraldic blossom of an iris. Fortuitous and provisional, the little nosegay broke all the rules of traditional good taste. At breakfast that morning I had been struck by the lively
dissonance of its colors. But that was no longer the point. I was not looking now at an unusual flower arrangement. I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation—the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence.

‘Is it agreeable?’ somebody asked. (During this Part of the experiment, all conversations were recorded on a dictating machine, and it has been possible for me to refresh my memory of what was said.)

‘Neither agreeable nor disagreeable,’ I answered. ‘it just is.’”

Huxley later on mentions the concept of is-ness. To which I will get back, later on. This experience from the early stages helps us to understand that even under the influence of a psychoactive substance, not anything slightly visually interesting will provoke an aesthetic experience. It shows that indeed the perception is shifted enough to provoke different experiences from the one the usual self would have.

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“The mind was primarily concerned, not with measures and locations, but with being and meaning.”

A moment of introspection that makes evident how his concern shifted from the trivial to insights, which shows us how in what way did his perception alter. This already points to the way of seeing that will unravel further in the text.

“Table, chair and desk came together in a composition that was like something by Braque or Juan Gris, a still life recognizably related to the objective world, but rendered without depth, without any attempt at photographic realism. I was looking at my furniture, not as the utilitarian who has to sit on chairs, to write at desks and tables, and not as the cameraman or scientific recorder, but as the pure aesthete whose concern is only with forms and their relationships within the field of vision or the picture space. But as I looked, this purely aesthetic, Cubist’s-eye view gave place to what I can only describe as the sacramental vision of reality. I was back where I had been when I was looking at the flowers-back in a world where

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26 ibid. p.6
It is now clear that Huxley’s preoccupation with the is-ness of things creeps into his aesthetic appreciation of reality of what could only be a mundane sight. What has been described here could be seen as the type of composition we rely photographers to capture and transform into artworks. A pure expression of form, lines, curves, thingliness that forms an aesthetic composition.

An amalgam of ordinary that by being so — transcends itself. In Huxley’s eyes the aesthetic gives way to the thing being itself. In his perception, he is looking beyond the thing, into the thing and into its being. Huxley’s focus shifted from purely form to a mixture of form and content, where both play an integral part of the thing’s being. The described sight could be seen as an aesthetic experience. The question here lies what lead it to a sense of completion? This will be discussed later on. For now I will not go into the mechanics of this, but let it suffice to say that the completion arises from the thing being itself — is-ness.

27 ibid. p.6
28 In the chapter Everyday from a spectator’s point of view.

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Huxley continues to explore further and picks up a few art books with reproductions of seminal paintings. The first image he encounters was Van Gogh’s *The Chair*, which he immediately links to the same essence he saw in the chair. He continues his browsing through the material and picks up a book on Botticelli’s art and stops at *Judith*.

“[…] the purplish silk of Judith’s pleated bodice and long wind-blown skirts.

This was something I had seen before-seen that very morning, between the flowers and the furniture, when I looked down by chance, and went on passionately staring by choice, at my own crossed legs. Those folds in the trousers — what a labyrinth of endlessly significant complexity! And the texture of the gray flannel — how rich, how deeply, mysteriously sumptuous! And here they were again, in Botticelli’s picture.”

This is a great example of how art relies on the mundane, ordinary to bring out an aesthetic experience.

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faithful reproduction of the folds in the textile, though not essential for the storytelling of the image, is used as a tool to provide a more lifelike picture for the viewer, giving it more impact.

This attention to detail is a stylistic choice and not a requirement for an aesthetic experience. But we can surely agree that there lies a specific pleasure in seeing something so irrelevant, but unmistakably part of life reality, so faithfully reproduced.

Textile behaviour — folding and crumpling are taken for granted and intuitively comprehended as something self evident. In reality fabric is a complex mesh of tensions and material properties that under various circumstances form in different shapes. Something we easily understand on the macroscopic, but would have harder time to analyse in detail. It is in essence a marvel of physics. The macro structure has its own properties dictated by the intricate micro, all the way to the quantum structure. It is the is-ness of the fabric that is admired.

“More even than the chair, though less perhaps than those wholly supernatural flowers, the folds of my gray flannel trousers were charged with ‘is-ness.’”

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30 ibid. p.10
“But in Judith’s skirt I could clearly see what, if I had been a painter of genius, I might have made of my old gray flannels. Not much, heaven knows, in comparison with the reality, but enough to delight generation after generation of beholders, enough to make them understand at least a little of the true significance of what, in our pathetic imbecility, we call ‘mere things’ [...]”

Here it crystallises that the admiration is not for the extraordinary or the superlative, but rather for the mere thing. It just happens that his admiration and attention was at that time devoted to fabrics. It is worth noting that in this case Judith’s skirt and Huxley’s flannels were both observed by a spectator. The skirt has been first seen by the artist, who reinterpreted it, but essentially both have been observed and perceived in its entirety. This way of seeing, the role of the spectator of the mundane is something I will discuss later on.

“That chair -shall I ever forget it? Where the shadows fell on the canvas upholstery, stripes of a deep but glowing indigo alternated with stripes of an incandescence so intensely bright that it was hard to

ibid. p.10
believe that they could be made of anything but blue fire. For what seemed an immensely long time I gazed without knowing, even without wishing to know, what it was that confronted me. At any other time I would have seen a chair barred with alternate light and shade. Today the percept had swallowed up the concept. I was so completely absorbed in looking, so thunderstruck by what I actually saw, that I could not be aware of anything else. Garden furniture, laths, sunlight, shadow - these were no more than names and notions, mere verbalizations, for utilitarian or scientific purposes, after the event. The event was this succession of azure furnace doors separated by gulfs of unfathomable gentian. It was inexpressibly wonderful, wonderful to the point, almost, of being terrifying.”32

It is clear that so far into the experience the visual effects of the drug started taking over his perception; nonetheless his better judgment does not seem to have disappeared and sent him into madness. Or if I dare say his skewed perception is not creating new aesthetic pleasures from the visual effects of the drug, but it is rather the other way around. Huxley’s intrigue with the is-ness of things seems to

32 ibid. p.16
affect how the world in front of him shifts. He seems to recognise that what he is looking at is merely everyday objects. Yet what his mind seems to recognise as ordinary is being enhanced and admired for what it is.\textsuperscript{33}

To better understand how is-ness plays a role and to have more insight into the beauty of the daily, I want to cite a few more examples of Huxley’s experiences. I think is unnecessary to dissect every single one and point out all the nuances. Pay special attention in the last one on the remark of is-ness.

“[…] a clump of Red Hot Pokers, in full bloom, had exploded into my field of vision. So passionately alive that they seemed to be standing on the very brink of utterance, the flowers strained upwards into the blue. Like the chair under the laths, they protected too much. I looked down at the leaves and discovered a

\textsuperscript{33} The validity of this type of experiences is very controversial. Some dismiss psychedelic trips as invaluable, others find them a great source of new perspectives. Alexander Shulgin was a chemist who dedicated his whole life researching psychotropic substances. He argued that the only way to asses the experience under influence was from a subjective self. As it would be nearly impossible to quantify something so personal from an outside perspective. More on the subject can be read in his book PiHKAL.
cavernous intricacy of the most delicate green lights and shadows, pulsing with undecipherable mystery."

“[…] the flowers in the gardens still trembled on the brink of being supernatural, the pepper trees and carobs along the side streets still manifestly belonged to some sacred grove. Eden alternated with Dodona. Yggdrasil with the mystic Rose. And then, abruptly, we were at an intersection, waiting to cross Sunset Boulevard. Before us the cars were rolling by in a steady stream - thousands of them, all bright and shiny like an advertiser’s dream and each more ludicrous than the last. Once again I was convulsed with laughter. The Red Sea of traffic parted at last, and we crossed into another oasis of trees and lawns and roses.”

“Here, in spite of the peculiar hideousness of the architecture, there were renewals of transcendental otherness, hints of the morning’s heaven. Brick
chimneys and green composition roofs glowed in the sunshine, like fragments of the New Jerusalem. And all at once I saw what Guardi had seen and (with what incomparable skill) had so often rendered in his paintings: a stucco wall with a shadow slanting across it, blank but unforgettably beautiful, empty but charged with all the meaning and the mystery of existence.  

“‘Within sameness there is difference. But that difference should be different from sameness is in no wise the intention of all the Buddhas. Their intention is both totality and differentiation.’ This bank of red and white geraniums, for example—it was entirely different from that stucco wall a hundred yards up the road. But the "is-ness" of both was the same, the eternal quality of their transience was the same.”

The aesthetic experiences are here driven by a different kind of awareness. Huxley had the opportunity to see certain ordinary scenes with a fresh look. His familiarity with them

36 ibid. p.18
37 ibid. p.19
has not vanished, so it is fair to say that they stayed ordinary, but what made them different was this new kind of perception.

We can establish that what made the experiences aesthetic was the realisation of the is-ness of things. Huxley basked in the beauty of the regular and felt fulfilled in seeing things for what they were — *mere things.*
Is-ness

I wonder what is the quality that in mere daily experiences would result in an aesthetic appreciation. I wonder if the beauty of an ordinary experience comes from its own being. Is it the is-ness that is being admired? How does this quality relate to us?

“‘Is-ness.’ The Being of Platonic philosophy - except that Plate seems to have made the enormous, the grotesque mistake of separating Being from becoming and identifying it with the mathematical abstraction of the Idea.”

The term was borrowed from Meister Eckhart, translated from the original istigkeit. The word comes from a theological background, namely Buddhism, but I do believe it incorporates more than just a spiritual quality. I would place it somewhere between language and consciousness.

Is-ness would be the being of anything, its pure existence, entirely consumed by itself. It is a qualitative state of

38 ibid. p.5
being itself, self contained and at the same time is a shared quality between all being. We could say our mind has such a quality before the Laconian split occurs, before a conflict is formed. A state of mind where the other has not been recognised and the consciousness has not been formed yet. “The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge,” creating a barrier between us and the world. “To formulate and express the contents of this reduced awareness, man has invented and endlessly elaborated those symbol-systems and implicit philosophies which we call languages. Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition [...] — the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people’s experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness [...] so that he is all too apt to take his

39 ibid. p.6

40 Again we enter in somewhat controversial waters, Huxley is arguing for a sort of higher awareness that is uninhibited while on mescaline. In this case the role of the brain would be to inhibit our mind from a spiralling vortex of stimuli, which would render us paralysed. This split between conscious and subconscious has been observed in psychology. The chains of the signifier and signified are sent in motion by this split. It would be self evident that the ability to recognise the difference between self and other is paramount for consciousness. Even though argued and worded differently both approaches talk about the same.
concepts for data, his words for actual things.” Here we can observe the strong tie our cognition has with language. For the signifier to attach to the signified a slippage of the symbolic chains has to occur.

When our linguistic self is awaken a split occurs. In the light of the other pure thought gets alienated from our conscious self. What Lacan denotes as the lack, the missing signifier, sets the signifier and signified chains in motion. In this moment our cognitions is formed, our self enters into a linguistic existence and is barred from its inner thought. The split is what makes pure thought always out of reach.

We could say that the verbal enunciation is formed through some sort of translation. The pure thought (the signified) has to find the appropriate words (signifier) to be expressed. Walter Benjamin in his work The Task of the Translator established that: “we must draw a distinction, in the concept of ‘intention,’ between what is meant and the way of meaning it. In the words Brot and pain, what is meant is the same, but the way of meaning it is not. This difference in the way of meaning permits the word Brot to mean something

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42 Translation from non verbal language to a verbal one.
other to a German than what the word *pain* means to a Frenchman,” showing that different languages are built by systemically different chains/meshes between signifier and signified. Inherently making evident that the signifier and signified are indeed not the same thing.

“In the individual, unsupplemented languages, what is meant is never found in relative independence, as in individual words or sentences; rather, it is in a constant state of flux — until it is able to emerge as the pure language from the harmony of all the various ways of meaning.” Benjamin sees this nonverbal thought as the pure or true language. We could considered it as some sort of very concise language in which the text and subtext never diverge; in which what is said and what is meant or, if you want, what is meant and the way of meaning are the same.

To circle back we should imagine a state in which the essence of the thought is brought forward in the most naked manner possible. The barrier between thought and being is abolished — again reverting to the pure form of existence. In this state no verbalisation would be needed.

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44 ibid. p.257
It is clear that enunciation of such thought is impossible, it is explicit that two beings on the same level would have hard time to communicate. Not just that, they would have hard time to distinguish themselves as individuals, as the distinction between self and other would not be formed. This means that for aesthetic appreciation distance is needed. The sense of completion cannot be achieved if the meaning in an artwork or the is-ness is constantly available and self-evident. “We define the aura [...] as the unique phenomena of a distance, however close it may be.”\textsuperscript{45}

Sometimes nonverbal communication on the basic level can be observed when people have been working together for a long time. Such a harmonious behaviour resembles more a well oiled machine than anything inherently human and linguistic. It is exactly beyond linguistics where the is-ness lies. It is and it always will be out of reach for the cognitive mind. In the end “do we not generally regard that which lies beyond communication in a literary work — and even a poor translator will admit that this is its essential substance — as the unfathomable, the mysterious, the ‘poetic’? And is this not something that a translator can reproduce only if he is also — a

poet?” It is not that we realise that there is something beyond words? That the true meaning of a text comes from more than just what is written? Is not that the being, the essence, the is-ness of the text is what strikes us?

If the is-ness in an artwork represents that which was encoded, is then the essence of the everyday what is being experienced as aesthetic? “In a way, an object is every bit as immaterial as a phone call. And a work that consist in a dinner around a soup is every bit as material as a statue.” The way our subjective self interacts with their symbolic structure is the same. The signified has to be probed through the linguistic structure and brought closer to our pure thought. The is-ness of a concept is as much out of reach from our linguistic self as it is for an object. Only if we are aware we can perceive the thing for what it is. I will dig deeper into this in the chapter *Everyday from a spectator point of view.*

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The changing nature of the everyday

The everyday environment is an ever changing mass of factors. It is a concoction of routines, rituals, spaces, habits, places, objects, images, aesthetics and another multitude of things and events that we encounter on a day to day basis.

The environment we are set into and inhabit will evolve over the course of our lifetime many times and all the time. Even the most rooted people who will live their whole life in the same house and keep one job for their entire career are subjected to changes. The most notable will happen during our growing years. From our first encounters with the world all up to adulthood when we are more or less reliant on ourselves. We grow out of the kindergarten, graduate elementary and find
our education and career path. All while our bodies continuously grow older.

We can obviously find variations between individuals’ independence, reliance on others and all in all their willingness to grow up or not. All in all I think it is safe to say we will be exposed to change through our life. On a general scale we can talk about moving from one place to another, changing jobs and apartments. Welcoming new people in our life or letting them go.

A number of minor changes will influence our life and by extension our everyday will adapt. A new norm will set into place and we will start to accept things as quotidian. We can find comfort and solace in the ritualistic, the more or less stable unchanging things; or what we say are the things that will not change. In this view the everyday is fragile and easily disturbed. An unexpected occasion is bound to tip off the balance, bring change and we are yet again bound to comply. Regardless of the gravity of the situation or its merry nature we find a way to subdue the circumstances and get used to them, or at least accustom.

It is relatable to see how people slip into a new everyday routine in non extraordinary circumstances. It is a completely different thing to try and imagine what people have to accept in horrific environments. Living through prolonged war time or even worse in a city under siege is not an easy thing
to get used to. In whole honesty I do not believe a person ever gets really used to the situation but is rather driven to accept the conditions and by sheer life strength is able to continue with his/her ‘daily’ life.

Sarajevo has been under siege for 1,425 days between 5 April 1992 to 29 February 1996\(^{48}\), people had to find a way to survive during this dire times\(^{49}\). I can recount on their daily routine only through what I have learned either through film recreation or documentary testimonials. For this reason I would like to bring forward a recent documentary by the French journalist Rémy Ourdan by the title *The Siege*\(^{50}\), released in 2016 and the Slovenian short *(A)Torzija*\(^{51}\) directed by Stefan Arsenijević and written by Abdulah Sidran, released in 2002. This later is a fictional story with elements rooted in reality.

Knowing a bit of the history and especially comparing it to the lives of the people in the former we can get some

\(^{48}\) source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Sarajevo

\(^{49}\) Any other city or place in such situation would be as valuable as an example. I have chosen Sarajevo only because I am more familiar with the events, due to geographical and cultural closeness. Since my childhood I have been exposed to depictions, documentaries and films that deal with the said war. This choice should not be seen as diminishing the recognition of the suffering of places at war at the moment of writing.

\(^{50}\) Unfortunately this movie is hard to find.

\(^{51}\) This movie can be found on Youtube.
understanding on how they tried to find something that would put their life on a more ordinary plane of existence. Concurrently we can observe how their routines were constantly broken by the reality of war.

*SPOILER ALERT*

The short film starts paneled out. We see a number of people busy with this and that. Then the story continues with a small quarrel that any one of us could relate to — a dispute over a long waiting time. This moments of normalcy is then broken of with a kid’s prank — rooted in the daily of a city under bombardment.

The boy whistles so it sounds like a grenade falling. Everyone ducks and we soon realise that even something like this can become a force of habit. Since this was a false alarm, everyone stands up and ignores the next whistling sound that proves to be a real grenade, again reminding us that this a city under siege.

The story moves forward towards the main plot, a cow with complications during birth. The owner starts searching for a veterinarian and finds him in our protagonist from the initial quarrel. He is part of a choir who wants to traverse the tunnel so they could represent Sarajevo in the European

52 During the siege of Sarajevo, they built an underground tunnel that connected the sieged city to the outside world.
Choir Contest. Luckily our protagonist attended a veterinary school for a short period, which made him the best candidate in the given circumstances.

The need for a veterinary on a farm would be a somewhat mundane occasion, not exactly a daily issue but over time definitely part of the routine. Our veterinarian proceeds to help the cow. Because of the circumstances, the bombing in the background, the cow is unsettled. Then our expert comes up with a solution — the choir should sing to soothe the cow.

They gather in the stable and start to sing, while others try and help the cow. And at this moment we are again reminded of what the everyday has become for these people. The choir was singing out of tune and the conductor stops them, completely ignoring the situation. A moment that completely brakes anything extraordinary going on. The fact of the war, the cow having difficulties, the stable where they ‘practice’ — all of it is put aside and they have slipped into their everyday mode of operation.

The rest of the story is then leaned on an extraordinary occasion. A birth with complications at every step that results in a happy ending with the young boy and his new calf looking forward to life.

*SPOILER ALERT END*
This portrayal is enhanced with testimonials from the documentary. The people of Sarajevo did in fact try to find a way to lead a normal life and defy the fact of war. We have to keep in mind that the siege was not only a physical warfare, but a psychological battle too. The city would be on occasions bombarded for long periods of time and at any hour of the day or night.

People in the city had to find a way to keep morale high. Some of them chose to fight back while others chose to weigh their battle on a different front. In an effort to defy the invaders and keep sane they tried to lead a ‘normal life’ for which they organised events that would be part of daily city life.

They threw underground parties, disregarding the fact of war, and most notably they set up a play in the destroyed library and a concert by the Sarajevo philharmonic53. All of it formed a sort of resistance, a way to show that the people of Sarajevo are strong and are not willing to give up their city. I would believe that this kind of behaviour helped them to keep a sane head and a way to deal with the reality of life under siege.

This example of how the everyday finds its way even in the most unexpected environments shows that we can overcome any changing force. This example shows that we can overcome any changing force and how unexpected circumstances can be appropriated. “Everyday objects, activities, and events, get defined as those with which we spend lots of time, regularly and repeatedly. Most often this means objects and events related to our work, home, and hobbies”54, or in extreme situations — instances we are stuck with.

Regardless of the nature of our everyday we conquer the environment and slip into routines. We tend to believe that the everyday is something unchanging, something long lasting. We might fantasise of a better tomorrow — on how we will break from the routine and enter into something new, different. But such fantasies are short-lived; even when realised; the new soon becomes the everyday.

When does that happen and what can we consider as everyday in this ever-changing environment? To answer this question we should look into the ways we define the everyday. It would be easy and rational to say that the everyday should be an objective state that we can observe from the outside. This would make the observations easily classified as scientific and the work straightforward, but unfortunately subjective.

experiences are hard to quantify and are inherently hard to put through rigorous methods.

It would be quite convenient to have an exact definition of the everyday, something we could easily identify and point at. But it is a very limiting view that does not take in account the nature of it. Additionally trying and frame the everyday from an outside perspective would be over-defining the subject without taking in consideration their point of view.

We could point to a general everyday, but that would limit us to a generalisation of it, which is nothing but an approximation of the former. Furthermore this exercise would allow only for what the majority would consider or agree to be part of the daily; creating boundaries and leaving out experiences of individuals not adhering to the ‘standard’.

We as the observer would be limited only to the quotidian in public spaces or other places where we would not invade on the personal privacy. Thus most probably leaving out all the personal everyday experiences or subject them to speculation. Or when observing the subject in private trigger a change due to the intrusion.

Much like electrons, the private everyday, cannot be observed in its entirety, measuring one aspect of it, leaves the other unknown. This leaves us only with the option of a subjective experience, leaving any generalisation outside.
To truly understand the everyday of an individual, the person itself is to disclose the details, the rituals, the habits, the environments and everything else that builds his/her everyday. It is only upon such discretion that we can, person by person, assess the daily. It is without a doubt that we would discover unique experiences for each individual and it is with the same confidence, I can say, that we would find similarities between them. Nonetheless we live in communities where many of the daily experiences are shared or happen in the same spaces.

From this point of view we have to understand that defining a general rule is impossible. We could proceed at stating that the everyday is the daily routines; “But, the everyday is clearly more than the mere proceedings of the day-to-day; rather, the everyday is exactly what it sounds like, namely, unifying: a totalizing analytic sanctifying experiences — the operation of a subjected being.”\textsuperscript{55} The everyday is what a subjected self accepts and ratifies as the new norm. The everyday does not start when we enter a new environment, rather when the self internalises it and redefines the signifier to include the new as everyday. Much like moving from an old home to a new one or from one town to another. Until we appropriate it as our everyday and our home, we are still viewing it as a new experience. The duration of this process

varies from person to person and even then from environment to environment. Some places we accept faster than others.
A personal issue

To develop an artistic practice from the *Aesthetics of Everyday / The Aesthetics of the Mundane* I need to look into my personal everyday experiences or how I view the everyday. During the process of production of the thesis, I have been observing my everyday and will continue to\(^{56}\). For the purposes of my studies I had to change the environment of the daily quite drastically. I had to empty my apartment back in Ljubljana, Slovenia and move my life to Finland. This change still to this day brings experiences that I find foreign, but have embraced to incorporate as daily. Aside that I will face bigger challenges during the production of the thesis because I will soon change places again. My return to Slovenia will be marked with a new living space where I have never lived before. Not just a new apartment; a new town as well.

This makes me think and consider on how to approach both the written and practical part. I know that because of the changes I will face — observation will be key. I will be in a transitional period. In a sense we could say this is part of a larger everyday. During my life I have moved a few times. First

\(^{56}\) At the moment of writing the date is 12 October 2017.
from my home town to a village, later to a new city, where I had changed a few apartments and finally the biggest move from one country to another. I will now return back, which should awake some of the old habits.

For the theoretical part I am deciding whether to keep a coherent monolithic structure, a hermetic text with an appearance of unity as it came out in one piece, or write a text that reflects the process and embraces the changes that brought the final conclusion to an end. The latter would provide some insight into how the thesis incorporated in my daily routine and if I am to pursue a very disciplined approach it could go hand in hand with my artistic experimentation.

This brings me to the practical side of the thesis. I have been paying attention to what is happening around me, but I have not employed any logging method yet. So far I rely on psychoanalytical mechanics, instead of meticulously writing down observations, I absorb information around me and digest it through my subconscious; which on a later date comes out either in writing or as an insight.

I do think that the everyday morphing from one reality to the other shall be noted in one or another way. At the moment of this log the issue is yet to be resolved and the proper method to be decided upon.

I have decided to keep some of the elements of the writing process reflect in the final text. The changes are not
coherently tracked, neither dated. Which I believe reflects my method of writing, which is neither chronological, neither linear.57

When moving readjusting your everyday is an interesting process. Certainly part of the routine moves with you to a new place, but part of it gets disturbed or even put upside down. If the change in the surroundings is minor, the daily will have to adjust less. The contrary goes when the new environment is completely different. I think the most notable change for me was in the kitchen. Obviously if you cook at home, and I do, your cuisine is something you travel with. The recipes you are familiar with are always with you. The issue arises when ingredients are hard or impossible to find. A new climate dictates adjustment in something so inherently daily as keeping yourself fed.

Another thing we always carry with us is language. A new country can mean a new barrier to bridge. Funny enough that my moving from Finland to a new area in Slovenia brought differences in dialect. The dialect in my home region is different from the place I lived last in Slovenia and the new area I moved to now, even though geographically closer to my birth place, has a different dialect from the later. The change surely is not as drastic as Slovenian to Finnish, but certainly makes me feel out of place even in my home country. With

57 Date of addition 9 February 2018 at 13:14.
time I will get used to it; in the end dialects are easier to pick up than languages.

What I might like the most when moving is transforming the new apartment into a home. Sure it is discomforting getting everything set up and is a bother finding furniture and all the rest. But making a space feel like home is sure satisfying. I believe that at that point it really starts turning the daily into the everyday.

Since I have been working on this subject I have been more attentive on what makes my day to day. I realised that my computer is a constant companion. It steps in when I need to work and when I relax at home with my girlfriend. It either sits on a desk while I type or on my lap when I am watching television. I have become aware of its constant presence and found aesthetic moments to extract.

Another ubiquitous source of aesthetic has been light. In both apartments, the Finnish and Slovenian it has found ways to create the most delightful sights on all sorts of surfaces. I have been paying quite a lot of attention to it, because of my photographic background and it has been a special source of enjoyment. It is only at a specific time that the sun shines just right to create beautiful patterns on walls, furniture and sometimes even on my computer. I remember a few occasions in Finland when I was typing this text and the sun through the window caught my attention. At one point it just made the
most perfect radial gradient, so subtle and such a delight. On another occasion I got a stripped pattern playing a game of shadows on my printed text.

Since I moved to the new place I have found a window in the hallway that frames just right the picturesque hospital that stands just across our building. It was erected during the Yugoslavian regime and consequently is of socialist aesthetics. The structure is quite remarkable in the town and is one of the first things you see. Every time I leave our apartment the window is just on the way out and I have been graced with many aesthetic views of the edifice. Sometimes the light hits it just with the right angle, sometimes the sky is clear and the turquoise and magenta colours of it match the sky most pleasingly. Other times the clouds give it a new look and even in the evening the street lighting makes it scenic.
Everyday from the spectator’s point of view

If we are to assess and discuss the aesthetic value of the everyday it is only logical to understand the mechanics behind an artwork and its aesthetics.

With the multitude of objects we interact on a daily basis we can categorise them into naturally occurring objects and human made objects. We can further divide human made objects in two groups: artefacts[^58] and artworks.

Artefacts and artworks are by themselves indistinguishable; if there is no person to look at them — their function and meaning has no value to themselves. The artefact

[^58]: Artefact would correctly be any human made object, artworks included. I have chosen to separate the two meanings for reasons that will be explained further in the chapter.
cannot experience an artwork and vice versa. For a distinction to be made a third party has to come into play. For the artwork or artefact to make an impact to be perceived we need a subjective self, someone who will experience them. We refer to this self as the spectator; understood in the widest way possible.

“How does the relationship between a spectator and an artwork work and how does it differ from spectator and artefact? To unpack this question I will start with the latter.

The spectator is unavoidably surrounded with objects and in an urban environment mostly artefacts. Foremost is non-living matter providing a framework for the living matter to live and grow on and in the midst of it are all the objects that humans made. All of it has a place in this complex relationship of existing things. Artefacts have specifically


60 And other hominids.
designated functions designed by us. In this mess of things the spectator has to learn to distinguish objects between themselves and then use some of them. So on which grounds is this relationship between an object (artefact) and spectator built? It is in fact a very direct, simple interaction. Tools are used, food consumed, buildings visited or lived in; in a manner, the relationships are very literal. The objects are merely observed and rarely contemplated.

In contrast to the previous, we should now look at the relationship between spectator and art. Artworks “are artefact and representation, both at the same time.” On a direct level an artwork, be it a painting or an installation, is an object. An artwork differs from an artefact in its symbolic value. Behind the materiality of an artwork, lies the potentiality of the symbolic charge that the artist encodes in the object. “The interaction between art work and spectator can then be seen as an interaction between the ‘thinking in the artwork’ and the ‘thinking of the spectator’” It is due to this coded symbolic

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62 Even music has its tangible form.

63 Wesseling, Janneke. The perfect spectator: the experience of the art work and reception aesthetics. Edited by Wendy Van Os-Thompson. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017. p.25
value that the spectator attempts to decode the meaning of the artwork. We should not forget that “the art work is not a pseudo-text. On the contrary, its legitimization derives specifically that which evades language.”  

64 and “To that end, the contemplation of an art work should be primarily geared to the question ‘how does the work work?’ rather than ‘what does the work mean?’ Looking at art works is different from normal, everyday looking. The contemplation of art is a performative action, not an ascertaining one. It is an active, critical relationship in which the spectator does not adopt a passive, contemplative attitude vis-à-vis the art work and so is not an ‘observer’. The word observer is inadequate when we look at art.”  

65 In respect to reproductive mimetic art, we have to understand that the element of mimesis is not the subject of the artwork but is rather one of the building blocks, part of the form for the expression of the work. Dewey when discussing on art’s role in ancient Greek times mentions: “For the doctrine did not signify that art was a literal copying of objects,  

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64 Wesseling, Janneke. The perfect spectator: the experience of the art work and reception aesthetics. Edited by Wendy Van Os-Thompson. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017. p.26

but rather it reflected the emotions and ideas that are associated with the chief institutions of social life.”66 A painter that portrays something, be it still life or tableau vivant, inherently produces a copy that is different from the original. If the likeness of the painting is hyper-realistic the duplicate still flattens the subject to a two dimensional surface. This transformation of the original is true for any kind of artwork. A sculpture would set the original in a different material and even if the resemblance would be near perfect the sculpture would be frozen in time. In any case the work of art would not be akin to the original, in some way it would differ, regardless of the detail put into the mimetic art. If it would be indistinguishable the artist would in fact replicate its subject and the two would be interchangeable; which I believe is safe to assume is not the case. It is due to this transformations that the original looses part of its integrity and it is exactly this void it leaves behind that needs to be filled. This void is where the symbolic value can be stored.

If this is how representational art works, what enables non-mimetic art to work the same way? For this we have to observe the reproductive act for what it actually is. A transfiguration of one form to another, which in linguistic terms would be known as translation. We know that a simple technical translation word by word does not carry on the

meaning withheld in the original form. For that reason the text has to undergo a change in a way to remodel the encoded meaning of the original into a new form — language. The artist performing a mimetic act has to, much like with language, take the original (and what s/he sees\textsuperscript{67}) then translate it into a new form — painting, sculpture, drawing, film, etc... This translation is true for any kind of non-mimetic art as well; in that case the translation is not of an existing form, but rather the artist’s thought, feeling or other.

The artwork then re-enters into the world and becomes a new element (object, performance, situation...) for the spectator to interact with. This translation — expression which is charged with symbolic value can then be decoded by our subjective self.

Continuing with the linguistic analogy, we take spoken and written languages as a very efficient way of communication; we consider them to be very close to the thinking process. And we rightly do so, they are great for communication and are very flexible. But in reality despite our proficiency they still lack compared to pure thought.

\begin{itemize}
\item Certain experiences can only be translated to spoken/written equivalents and not expressed in their real form;
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{67} This is where the artist point of view, or inner feelings can be added to the mechanical reproduction of the seen. This is the part of expression that can be added to the ‘translation’.
Certain experiences cannot be completely expressed in spoken/written language, they can be only translated into linguistic counterparts and never uttered in their real form; think of pain, taste, smell, etc. Feelings and sensory experiences are probably one of the hardest ‘thoughts’ to express in language.

Love must be one of the feelings that has been retold over and over again and still to this day no verbal expression has been able to come close to what love is. It is no wonder countless plays, poems and movies were written on this theme. If the word love would be enough to describe the complexity of what its pure form is, we would not have any need for so many ways of expressing it. Needless to say that certain things cannot be expressed just with words.

Spoken/written language can express a great deal of meaning, but there is no denying that there are parts it cannot convey.

In day to day communication we often rely on additional ways of articulating. Spoken language is frequently accompanied by gesticulation, a learned language that adds to the expression of certain directions, emotions... The later are regularly conveyed with facial expressions, voluntary or involuntary. And even more social conventions are non-linguistically communicated.

It is self-evident that any form of communication inherits a certain transformation from meaning to expression.
An artwork holds a special position in communication. Most symbolic exchanges fit in the pre-existing signifier—signified chain, artworks thrive on establishing new relations.

As mentioned before, when creating an artwork, the artist has to translate his/her artistic vision into a new medium; and while doing so leaves a void behind — a lack. Much like in the Lacanian formation of consciousness, the realisation of this lack sets the signifier—signified chains in motion;\(^{68}\)

The coded symbolic value resides in the void left behind and it is a unique trait of the artwork; it could be exactly what evades language. We have to understand that the meaning interlocked in the artwork does not come from the same verbal thinking process we are familiar with, this goes as well for the artist. This new sliding chain of the signifier—signified is as much out of reach for the author as the rest of us — as it comes from nonverbal thinking. “Kemp formulates as follows: ‘...the fundamental assumption that every art work is deliberately unfinished in order to be brought to completion in and through the beholder — with the emphasis on intended or programmatic or constructive incompletion’ [...] Kemp believes that a ‘blank’ is a ‘communicative requirement’ or an

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\(^{68}\) it brings nonverbal thought into verbal, the subject becomes immerse in language.
‘open connection’”⁶⁹ With my comment that an artwork is not deliberately unfinished, but that is lacking due to its nature. Concluding that an aesthetic object holds a potentiality for a communication; the symbolic value nestled in the void initiates a communication with the beholder.

The artwork is not fully realised until it has been experienced by the spectator. An artwork becomes an aesthetic object only when it activates an aesthetic experience. “So the aesthetic object is not the art work itself, nor does it relate to the artist’s intention. The aesthetic object is the art work as formed in the spectator’s perception, in the interaction between reader and text, or between spectator and art work. The aesthetic object is the relation between the two.”⁷⁰ The spectator is thus fundamental in activating the artwork. It is only when someone starts reading, interacting and communicating with the artwork that the encoded symbolic value starts to unravel. Otherwise the meaning stays nestled in the void, waiting for decoding. The spectator brings to completion and satisfaction the embedded meaning that harmoniously coincides with the form of the aesthetic object. It

⁶⁹ Wesseling, Janneke. The perfect spectator: the experience of the art work and reception aesthetics. Edited by Wendy Van Os-Thompson. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017. p.58

⁷⁰ Wesseling, Janneke. The perfect spectator: the experience of the art work and reception aesthetics. Edited by Wendy Van Os-Thompson. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017. p.50
is in the synthesis of the object itself and its representational value (encoded symbolic value) that the spectator is able to come to an aesthetic experience.
How an artwork activates an aesthetic experience is fairly straightforward as we have seen. But what sort of mechanism allows us to have an aesthetic experience away from the presence of an artwork?

Are aesthetic experiences possible only through artistic objects? Definitely not! Both artists and spectator are able to have aesthetic experiences outside the artistic. What mechanism allows the artist and spectator to have this kind of experiences?

We can surely argue that an artist is already equipped with the knowledge and know-how for creating objects with the potentiality to start an aesthetic process. S/he is surely qualified to recognise the aesthetic potential. It is entirely plausible that an artist would be, due to his/her training, able to recognise the potential and jump to attach the non-verbal thought and immediately encode and decode what an artwork would represent. Finally having an aesthetic experience from it. This goes certainly in line with the aforementioned mechanism of the symbolic value encoded in an art object.

What about the common spectator? Someone who is not an artist and is at best an occasional art viewer. How does such a person have an aesthetic experience in the light of a potential object or scene? It would be entirely possible to
assume that the layman, even thought not trained as an artist, holds the same potential for creative thinking and coding the symbolic value. I do believe, that creative thinking is inherently a human value that is present in every individual and is probably one of the most important ways of thinking for the human kind in general, if not the driving force of any advancement. But I do not think this is the key to an aesthetic experience.

Before we return to the discussion on the role of the spectator, as the one having the aesthetic experience in face of an artwork or the everyday, we have to clear up on what having an aesthetic experience is about. Or better put why are we talking about an experience and not the aesthetic value of an artwork, an object or the everyday. What is an aesthetic experience? What are the mechanics of its working? This is a very extensive subject and it would well deserve a book. And rightly there was more than one book written about it. For the purpose of this argumentation I will lean on John Dewey’s book *Art as Experience*.

I have to mention that the book brings forward several good points and its general direction is quite solid, but I am not completely behind it. There are a few passages that are in my
view a miss on the topic. It might be due to the datedness\textsuperscript{71} of it or just that Dewey in the end does not write a concise hermetic text on what is an aesthetic experience. On the other hand the book is not exactly about an aesthetic experience but rather a collection of texts that in totality portray how art is an experience\textsuperscript{72} rather than an aesthetic object.

All of which is even more adhering to my topic of the aesthetic of the everyday/mundane. Nonetheless the later is a collection of experiences and not objects. Having an everyday is a set of occurrences which in totality form a typical day. Not an identical day to others, but a similar day, a day we would recognise as median. It is a day of ordinary experiences.

If we are looking into the aesthetics of the everyday we are observing experiences and not objects. Even when the aesthetic inquiry revolves around an object we are talking about an experience and not about the aesthetic value of the said object.

Let me expand on that. As I mentioned in the beginning of the chapter when we examined aesthetic objects or objects and artefacts at large and their aesthetic value, we already asserted that neither of them can be judged on their aesthetic value without (subjective) self being present. It is this

\textsuperscript{71} It has to be noted that the book has its share of white privilege and is at moments cringe worthy as how politically incorrect is.

\textsuperscript{72} In all fairness, that is exactly what the title is.
self that through interaction with the object or artefact opens up any possibility for an aesthetic development. It is through the experience had in the presence of the object that the aesthetic emerges. “The *product* of art—temple, painting, statue, poem—is not the *work* of art. The work takes place when a human being coöperates with the product so that the outcome is an experience that is enjoyed because of its liberating and ordered properties.”

We now face two main predicaments of what means to have an experience and what makes something aesthetic. Concluding into what and how do you have an aesthetic experience. Both inquiries are a mountainous task and I will not attempt to definitely resolve them here and now. For the former I think it is safe to put that an experience is any transformative or cumulative interaction of the self. Be it with the other, meaning anything but self, or an interaction coming from within. It is here evident that the subjective self is a precondition for an experience. “In other fields of experience a preliminary distinction between self and object is not only legitimate but necessary.”

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74 An entire chapter in Dewey’s book — ‘Having an Experience’.

The later issue is impossibly hard to define. Deciding what is aesthetic is a controversial topic through ages if not since we had any sense of beauty. “De gustibus non est disputandum.” The phrase roughly translates to: “We do not discuss of taste(s).” It is in common knowledge that personal taste is not quantifiable and objective. The matter of taste is brought to existence through the subjective self and (in a simplified manner) we could assume that is because of their individuality that people have different tastes.

Due to this discrepancies I do not plan to offer a one-fits-all solution to what is aesthetic. I will rather point out to the sensibilities and the agreeable. By agreeable I mean a sharable sense of beauty. For example, how with some we find the same things attractive, nice, enjoyable, etc. Instinctively we are aware there is something common to the beautiful, aesthetic. And we instinctively know how easy is to disagree.

In the fields of art we learn to see the potential of the aesthetic and understand that someone else might see something as such. In addition the artworld changes constantly and not the same things are sought the same way as they used to be. Mediums change, interest of the content changes in the end the artworld is subjected to a constant flux of form — content ratio. Think of Rothko and abstract art or Vermeer

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76 A latin maxim.
with his realistic paintings. This changes then vary from field to field. All in all there is variety in the artworld.

Furthermore we encounter different approaches in the search for the aesthetic. *In Praise of Shadows*⁷⁷ — comes to mind. An interesting insight into Japanese culture and their approach to aesthetics. If we contrast this to the type of writing like Kant, we are faced with a completely different picture. Trying to define what can be aesthetic is impossible. At best, I believe, we would end up with a catalogue of approaches all coming from their unique view. The reader would be left discovering new perspectives on the aesthetic endlessly. In all fairness, the catalogue would never be finished. As newer experiences would surface new types of gratification would emerge. I believe that every self has the possibility to expand his/her vision of the aesthetic through their entire life, endlessly finding new types of aesthetic experiences.

Nonetheless there has to be some common ground between them, some vague connection that ties the aesthetic together. I believe what would be agreeable is that an aesthetic experience has an element of enjoyable at some point throughout its process and I believe there is some sense of completion.

⁷⁷ Written by Jun’ichirō Tanizaki; published 1933.
I have a suspicion that this sense of completion emerges from the mechanics of the aesthetic experience itself. As we established so far an artwork holds potentiality for communication through the encoded symbolic value—a way for the subjective self to open communication between: the object, the self and the coded symbolic value. “For communication is not announcing things, even if they are said with the emphasis of great sonority. Communication is the process of creating participation, of making common what had been isolated and singular; and part of the miracle it achieves is that, in being communicated, the conveyance of meaning gives body and definiteness to the experience of the one who utters as well as to that of those who listen.”78 All of which with the sense of discovery brings a sense of completion.

But how is the conversation initiated with an object without an additional symbolic value? The conversation has to be initiated from within. The self has to go through the process of recognition to come to perception with the help of awareness. “Recognition is perception arrested before it has a chance to develop freely. In recognition there is a beginning of an act of perception. But this beginning is not allowed to serve the development of a full perception of the thing recognized. It is arrested at the point where it will serve some other purpose,

as we recognize a man on the street in order to greet or avoid him, not so as to see him for the sake of seeing what is there.” 79 And only if we perceive the object rather than recognise it can we truly come to the completion of seeing it. Then we can attach a sense of beauty to it.

If we summarise; artworks and other objects differ in the meaning they hold. An artwork holds an encoded symbolic meaning in the void that has been created during its creation in opposition to any other object that is completely filled with its own being. Because of this we know to give ourselves to the artwork and take the time to perceive it in its entirety. “In a way looking at art is perfectly simple. One merely needs to take the art work for what it is, open oneself up to it and take the time to experience it.” 80; instead of merely recognise it — observe it. The spectator is then awarded with a dialectical experience. In contrast to other objects that tend to be merely recognised instead of being perceived and consumed in its entirety. Only in the rare occasion when the spectator is completely aware, is s/he then able to see the objects in their entirety and develop an aesthetic experience.


80 Wesseling, Janneke. The perfect spectator: the experience of the art work and reception aesthetics. Edited by Wendy Van Os-Thompson. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017. p.11
In conclusion something can be aesthetic or better put something can trigger an aesthetic experience only in the presence of the spectator — the self. An artwork will be activated only with the help of the spectator. The same goes for experiences had in the everyday, mundane. This experiences can become aesthetic only if the spectator is present and aware of them. The beauty of the everyday thus lies in the attentiveness of the one experiencing it.
“Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication.”  

Appendix
There is an uncountable number of everyday experiences that one could analyse and there is even a greater number of experiences that we collectively regard as everyday. This chapter is not going to be an attempt to meticulously catalogue all such experiences; and this chapter is not about an in-depth analysis of such experiences. It is more a chapter on ways of looking and possibilities of everyday experiences, it thus will never have a complete overlook on the subject. I hope it will serve as a sort of tool for recognising this kind of mundane but aesthetic experiences.
Currently I do not have a cup of coffee next to me as the day is already approaching the evening. As well I had my share today at some 5 cups, I believe. I bring this up, because a cup of coffee next to me brings me both comfort and energy, but the act of drinking it has its own merits. It often coincides with a reflective pause between one thought and another.

While typing and enunciating my unformed thoughts the coffee awaits at the side. And just when I manage to stumble on a thinker or successfully circle back a thought it sits there prepared for me to have a less involved moment. My focus during the thinking process holds me in a mental space that exists inside — shut from the outside. My mind is mostly occupied with the written words on the screen and thoughts forming in my head.

When the process comes to a pause or ends I have again time to take in the environment. But If I am still pondering on something I will at most reach for the cup and make it part of my focus. It is only at that moment that my mind takes a brake. Then the focus moves to the cup, its content and the

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82 At the time of writing it is 17:33 on the 4th of January 2018.
sensation of the silky liquid entering my body. This is a type of daily experiences that I have come to consciously cherish and enjoy in their aesthetic value. It is a mundane task not much different from the glass of water during lunch, but it has a very distinct special position. I would say that the fact it lies in between intensive mental tasks focus provides a special type of break. This transforms it from the mere act of drinking into an aesthetic experience.

The described experience is something that is probably very personal and not many would identify with it; at least not in the same way. I am quite an avid coffee drinker and I do give a lot of thought to my coffee. Not everyone shares my approach to coffee drinking and many people treat it in a more nonchalant way. Regardless of how much you like coffee I think this next example might be a bit more relatable. Mind though that it could be replaced with a cigarette or a cup of tea; and probably some other things too, but we will never find something that everyone would agree on or relate to.

I have in mind a coffee break. Understood quite widely, from a coffee break at work to a spontaneous coffee break at a local café. This last variant relates to the fore mentioned one — as both represent a change of state and obviously both include coffee as the premise for the experience.

A coffee break has the quality of being a transient state, that gets wedged in the middle of whatever happens on both
ends of it. The activity holds an ever greater potential for pleasure when it is lodged in between laborious activities; we know that the time given for this break to gather strength and relax our brain is limited. It is thus even more cherished.

Coffee inherits a ritualistic nature and the same goes for tea. Regardless of the way of preparation there is some ritualistic activity attached. The ritualistic nature carries over to the same experience in a café. Going to a different place can disrupt the established ritual and generate more adversity than pleasure. All in all the aesthetic value of this coffee brake does not come from it being extra-ordinary, but rather from the force of habit.

*Jim Jarmusch* captures a very concise visual depiction of this habit in his film *The Limits of Control*. The Lone Man continuously orders coffee at a café, the two cups of coffee get captured in a stunning eye-candy manner. It is easy to draw similarities with our own experiences and see through the beauty of this mundane experience. It was personally very easy to relate as the coffee in my region gets served similarly, but I do not think the relatable part is this exact coffee arrangement but rather the consistency, repetitiveness and simplicity of the way the cups are presented. In the end the man orders two cups not one, which is quite odd. But in the end people have their own specific rituals.

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One essential activity we have elevated from basic need to an art form would be food. Chefs dedicate a long portion of their life to learn and make the best dish possible, some go to extremes and serve impeccable dishes, prepared with the highest care and served in all sorts of manner. It is rightfully stated that cooking became somewhat of an art form, where taste and presentation intertwine in a holistic experience. But this kind of haute cuisine restaurants are for the most part of the population over their budget as a frequent routine or even less a daily habit. And I am not interested in what makes this special meals transcend mere eating. What I find inherently aesthetic are the numeral dinners or lunches we take the time to share with people we care.

I will detour from the thoroughly daily activity of nourishing oneself. Not that it would not hold any aesthetic potential, but I find shared meals a particularly mundane experience, that often goes overlooked for its integral role in the society. Many traditions, religious or secular revolve, around food in one way or another. The important holidays spent with family frequently include a dinner, lunch or something alike. It is a way to hold society together through
ritual and shared memories. Sharing a meal creates a special bond; we surround ourselves with people we trust during an integral part of our life. Food in the end is a necessity, not just enjoyment.

Culture grew around food. People keep putting food in the centre of all sorts of social events. If it is not a meal at someone’s house it might be at a restaurant or even just a quick bite. There are a number of occasions where social interactions are helped along with shared food. A satisfied stomach and pleasurable social interaction can provide a sense of completion.

It is evident that the pleasure of satisfying a basic need (eating) coinciding with a delicious meal and a positive atmosphere would have a positive impact on the self. But this would not necessarily describe an aesthetic experience but rather any kind of pleasure. This is where my interest for meals comes in. I do not think that this kind of quality would exclusively pertain to the aforementioned but I find it easier to illustrate through a single example. It should not be too hard to extrapolate the core of it and apply it to other similar experiences.

What makes a shared dinner special is not so much in the meal itself. It would be a combination of factors. For illustration I will take an example when the host cooks for the guests and they are friends or the host cares about the guests in one way or another. On such occasions the meal tends to be
prepared with extra care. In the case of cultural differences, as minor or big as they are, this is a moment when the host has an opportunity to share with the guest something personal, cultural. It is over food being served and drinks being drank that conversation can evolve.

What makes this experience aesthetic is the realisation that all of this factors come together. The anticipation which precedes a bite into a meal so carefully prepared, the suspension before the discovery of what is being served, the mundane chit-chat that comes along, the eventual drinks that come or not with a story or toast, the social customs, the consumption of the hard work and the realisation that all of this is time well spent with the people you choose (to have a dinner with). I do not think this aesthetic experience is realised at the end of the meal, but rather at some point in the middle, when all of this puzzle pieces flow into place.

I do not have a ready recipe on how to spread this reasoning to any kind of shared meal, but I do believe there is something inherently beautiful in this social interaction. It might be perhaps the fact that compared to other mundane tasks this is something that again wedges itself into a special time frame. It demands of us to take the time and commit ourselves to the activity. We can give it our full attention and really immerse ourselves in the experience, contrary to a meal
in a busy day when our attention is divided between many tasks and we cannot afford to be completely aware.
Something I have come to realise holds an aesthetic potential and upon realisation becomes an aesthetic experience is what I came to call \textit{doorway talks}. I came to this realisation upon one dinner I had with some friends at our place. This time the aesthetic experience arose only at the time our friends left, or better put when they were about to leave. I had one of those \textit{aha} moments and realised the aesthetic value of this serendipitous activity, which retroactively and prospectively affected all such instances.

I have not paid much attention to this behaviour before the realisation. But after it I understood how precious are all such moments, past and future.

The doorway talk happens when someone is leaving your house or vice versa. Occasionally after some time spent together with a person a conversation will start or continue at the door when they are about to leave. It happens that even though this were meant as goodbyes a more than adequate length conversation develops. A person could even go as far as to ask themselves if it would not be better to go back inside and continue there. But this is rarely the case. Somehow the departure is imminent and this time feels like borrowed.
It is obvious why I named this phenomena doorway talks. But I do not think what sets it apart from other conversations is so much the location, but rather all the circumstances. A person would think that after hours of conversation there would not be any need to stop at the entrance and chat some more. But it happens and that is probably where the beauty lies. As an activity in its own right is probably as mundane as many others and it does not hold any extra value. Only after we are aware of what is happening and see through the conversations and observe the situation for its meta narrative can we extrapolate the aesthetic value of it.

The transition between private and common space (apartment and hallway or home and outside) creates a type of threshold that when crossed represents an end. The hosts and guests stopping at the door and continuing the conversation represents a way to hold on to the time spent together. This can give both parties a sense of belonging. The interesting part is that the content of the conversation is not of essential nature. Any topic would suffice. The experience becomes aesthetic because the realisation of it happening fulfils us. Humans are social beings and have a need for confirmation.

This is a type of activity that becomes aesthetic in its suspension before its ending. The completion of the experience can occur before it ends. Because the content of the conversation does not need to come to an end for the sense of
completion to emerge, the aesthetic experience can be had before its ending. The main component of this experience is becoming aware of the activity and realise its beauty.
The beauty of waiting

A much dreaded activity that we frequently encounter in our lives is waiting. There are different types of waiting. We can divide waiting in two main types — determined and undetermined waiting. The former is a kind of waiting that has a specified time and it results in a sort of countdown. Waiting for the pasta to be cooked, waiting for a TV show to end or waiting for an appointment to come up. The undetermined waiting is the opposite of it. The time that we have to spend for something to occur or finish is undefined. Waiting for the wind to pass, for the next storm\textsuperscript{84}, waiting for a reply on an e-mail or someone to show up. The determined waiting is much more programmed and we plan on shortening our time accordingly while the undetermined waiting gives us a somewhat undefined timeframe and we have to plan for activities we can afford to interrupt.

After a surgery I had I was regularly visiting the doctor for check-ups. Regardless of the scheduled appointment the waiting time at the doctor’s office was long. I believe that every time I went I had to wait for hours. I soon realised that the time

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\textsuperscript{84} Even though we have become quite good at predicting weather.
would be better spent if I would read something while waiting and so I did.

I think this was the first time I started to appreciate the time that would be anyway reserved for waiting. Because a person becomes trapped in the situation and is required to be present during the waiting a specific time window opens that allows you to spend time on things you otherwise might not. This is not exclusively tied to reading, nor it is tied to some other activity that you choose to occupy yourself with. (This as well applies to moments when you have nothing scheduled and all of your typical distractions are missing.)

If we resign and accept the waiting, we can let the frustration aside and enjoy this extra time. We have time to take in the environment as banal as it is and just soak in everything it has to offer. While waiting we have time to become aware of what is around us, especially if we sit still in a room. We have time to become at ease with the environment and we have time to let go of anything else. We know that our regular routine will have to wait for this time to be over, only after the waiting period is over can we resume our normal activities.

It goes without saying this is only valid if we have the luxury to relax. But when we have the possibility to give in and realise the normal tempo will have to resume after what we are waiting for is over, then we truly have time to become aware.
The aesthetic experience has to come here from the being aware and present in the situation and not from the environment or the activity we are performing (i.e. reading a book). Because we have time to observe and take in everything around us we have time to understand, feel it as what it is in its totality. The specific position in the daily routine has to play a role as well. Because this waiting time is occupied by no activity and often wedges itself in between what would be our daily rhythm gives the experience a suspended feeling. This adds to the totality of the scene, we are somewhat put outside ourselves and can reflect on our being in the moment.
Bibliography


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(move accordingly)

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Chapter Five

Living and Experiencing the Everyday Through Daily-life

Olli Niskanen and Katja Väisänen

Introduction

Despite the ubiquity and presence, the concept of the everyday has been notoriously difficult to define. While our everyday is all around us, it is not always clear to us. It is in another sense that the everyday is constantly experienced, contained by routines and the ordinary expectations that society has of us. The everyday is not only a familiar setting for us, but also a constant source of phenomena for us to experience.

Ten Approaches to the Everyday

What is the everyday with its preoccupation of an everyday aesthetics and its everyday theoretical directions? The first approach, the new everyday aesthetics, has been characterized by the everyday with its preoccupation of an everyday aesthetics and its everyday theoretical directions. The second approach, the everyday, has been characterized by the everyday with its preoccupation of an everyday aesthetics and its everyday theoretical directions.