

Draft. For definitive version, see *A Companion to Aesthetics (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy)*, 2nd edition, ed. Stephen Davies, Kathleen Higgins, Robert Hopkins, Robert Stecker and David Cooper (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 136-139.

aesthetics of the everyday The discipline of aesthetics has tended, especially for the past century, to focus on encounters with the fine arts and, to a lesser extent, with nature. Much attention has been devoted to the projects of defining art and establishing its ontology, and accounts of aesthetic experience and aesthetic properties have been derived primarily from considerations related to Western artworks. In the last few decades, though, there has been a movement away from the narrowly art-oriented approach and toward recognition of the continuity between experiences of fine art and experiences from other domains of life. This movement has given rise to an emerging sub-discipline often known as 'everyday aesthetics' or 'the aesthetics of the everyday'. Theorists in the aesthetics of the everyday typically claim that objects and activities not essentially connected to art or nature can have aesthetic properties and/or that they can give rise to significant aesthetic experiences. Aesthetic analysis, then, is appropriately extended to virtually all areas of life.

John Dewey's (1934) *Art as Experience* has had a great influence on contemporary work in everyday aesthetics. Dewey suggested that the experiences of aesthetic exaltation associated with art can be traced back to processes that pre-date art and, indeed, that both humans and other animals partake in. Aesthetic experience, according to Dewey, is on a continuum with the deep feelings of fulfillment that arise from interacting with the environment to satisfy one's needs. What distinguishes aesthetic experiences from non-aesthetic aspects of experience, he claims, is not that they involve response to a particular set of objects, as many aesthetic traditionalists would claim, but that they exhibit qualitative unity as well as a sense of closure or consummation. These qualities can belong even to simple experiences like that of lifting a stone, as long as it is done with sufficient attention (Dewey 1934: 44). Dewey's view is thus highly amenable to the application of aesthetic concepts throughout everyday life.

Despite its significant expansion of the territory of the aesthetic, Dewey's view has been criticized as too restrictive by some aestheticians of the everyday. Mindful of contemporary developments, they observe that many objects in the fine arts lack unity and closure or give rise to experiences that are 'disjointed, severed, and jarring' (Novitz 1992: 9), but are nonetheless counted as aesthetic by traditional art-oriented theories. Indeed, their fragmented nature may be precisely what gives them their distinctive aesthetic qualities (Irvin 2008). It cannot, then, be a necessary condition for an experience's being aesthetic that it exhibit unity or closure. This conclusion is in line with recent developments in accounts of aesthetic experience, which no longer tend to claim that an experience must be positive in valence or must have a particular qualitative character to count as aesthetic.

Though particular aspects of Dewey's account may be criticized, the Deweyan strategy of deflating traditional distinctions between the fine arts and other domains of life has remained central to the aesthetics of the everyday. Some theorists have observed that the aesthetic phenomena invoked in traditional discussions of art are also present in other domains of life such as sport, sex, and everyday decision-making (Kupfer 1983). Moreover, aestheticians have increasingly rejected the Kantian notion that the aesthetic

attitude involves holding oneself distant from the object of contemplation and remaining indifferent to any non-artistic functions it may serve. Arnold Berleant (1991) argues that the proper attitude toward artworks is one of deep engagement of the whole person, an attitude which, he suggests, is quite naturally taken toward the objects of ordinary life as well. The traditional division of the senses into higher' and 'lower,' and the associated suggestion that aesthetic experience must be exclusively the province of the former, has been challenged as arbitrary, with the result that ordinary activities involving taste and smell (Korsmeyer 1999; Emily Brady in Light & Smith 2005 ch. 10) or touch (Shusterman 2000 chs. 7 & 10) have been rendered eligible for aesthetic consideration.

The sharp distinction between the fine arts and other domains of life has also been challenged by the observation that art emerges out of, and is in many contexts integrated with, everyday practices. Crispin Sartwell (1995) and Yuriko Saito (2007) observe that, particularly in non-Western cultures, works of art and aesthetically oriented design objects are often made to enhance everyday life. David Novitz (1992) notes the implausibility of seeing popular art forms as segregated from everyday life: works of television and pop music often take the mundane as their subject matter, and their consumption is integrated with the ordinary activities of life. Moreover, recent developments within the Western fine arts have arguably brought art and life closer together, as ordinary objects have been exhibited in gallery settings and ordinary sounds have been integrated into avant-garde musical compositions. These techniques seem to invite us to apply to everyday objects and events the same aesthetic regard traditionally reserved for artworks.

While much of the defense of everyday aesthetics has grown out of observations related to art, another important force has been the burgeoning of environmental aesthetics. While taking its initial impetus from the Kantian interest in the sublime, environmental aesthetics has evolved to include consideration of a wide variety of environments and phenomena. An interest in natural science has moved some environmental aestheticians to acknowledge the difficulty of drawing a principled distinction between the natural and the non-natural: since humans are animals, and their artifacts, behaviors, and environments arise in large part out of evolved capacities, the natural and non-natural seem to be best thought of as lying along a continuum rather than on opposite sides of a sharp divide. If an aesthetic regard can properly be cast on natural objects and environments, then, there is no obvious reason not to extend it further. More generally, the attention to environments, rather than isolated objects, has led to the recognition of a mode of aesthetic experience that is complex, immersive, and multisensory, and thus readily applicable to everyday life.

Once the barriers separating everyday life from art and nature have been broken down, a positive case remains to be made for the interest of applying aesthetic concepts to ordinary objects and phenomena. The interest is claimed to be both practical and theoretical. From a practical perspective, the claim is often made that a serious interest in the aesthetics of the everyday promises a richer life, as we attend to satisfactions that are readily available but that we may not have tended to notice or take advantage of. Indeed, Shusterman (2000 ch. 10) suggests that everyday aesthetics should include practical training in bodywork and related disciplines, precisely to secure the benefit of a more satisfying life. The aesthetics of the everyday also has moral implications. Kupfer argues that 'the aesthetic dimensions in everyday life are ... instrumental in developing people

into more deliberate, autonomous community members' (1983: 3). Irvin (2008) argues that aesthetic satisfactions in everyday life can be harnessed to support moral behavior. And as Sartwell (1995) points out, in many cultural and, especially, spiritual traditions the moral and the aesthetic are seamlessly integrated within everyday life.

From a theoretical perspective, it has been suggested that the aesthetics of the everyday is of special interest because everyday phenomena may require aesthetic insights and concepts distinct from those needed to account for art and nature (Saito 2007: 5). Many of the aesthetic properties exhibited by everyday phenomena, for instance, may be different from those derived from a prominently art-oriented aesthetics (Leddy 1995). At the same time, the aesthetics of the everyday may be used as a source of insights about the nature of art: Sartwell suggests, based on observations about the continuity between art and everyday life in many cultures, that art should be redefined as 'skilled and devoted making' that may eventuate in artifacts that serve a variety of everyday functions (1995: 9).

Attempts to demonstrate the theoretical interest of everyday aesthetics bring out a methodological tension that inheres in the discipline. On the one hand, in order to demonstrate that it really is a sub-discipline of aesthetics, the aesthetics of the everyday must demonstrate that, at some level, it is fundamentally concerned with the same concepts and phenomena that have preoccupied mainstream aesthetics. This is why so much of the discipline has been concerned to break down barriers between art and other domains of life. On the other hand, though, if it is to be of interest, everyday aesthetics must show that it has a distinctive contribution to make to aesthetics by virtue of introducing a distinctive subject matter, methodology, or set of aesthetic concepts. This tension continues to animate the discipline: aestheticians of the everyday continually refer back to and demonstrate connections to traditional aesthetic objects, properties, and experiences, even while suggesting that mainstream aesthetics has been too restrictive in its treatment of them.

The breadth of content and approach advocated within the aesthetics of the everyday leaves the discipline vulnerable to two objections. First, one might suspect that it renders the notion of the aesthetic so broad as to be meaningless. If aesthetic experience can happen at any time, can take anything as its object, and need have no particular qualitative feel, is there really any distinction between the aesthetic aspects of experience and its other aspects? Such a concern is presumably what motivated Dewey to require qualitative unity and closure: these criteria ensure that not every possible experience will fall into the category of the aesthetic, and thus secure the non-triviality of the concept. If such requirements are rejected, it appears that any experience may qualify as aesthetic just by virtue of having a qualitative feel. This is a conclusion that aesthetic traditionalists are likely to find unpalatable, even as aestheticians of the everyday may welcome it. Second, since everyday aesthetics tends to emphasize aesthetic experiences and objects that are not exalted in character, one may wonder if it really warrants our attention. Would it not ultimately be more rewarding to focus on great artworks and the natural sublime, which promise more significant edification? The aesthetician of the everyday may reply that the aesthetic pleasures of everyday life are worth acknowledging because they are available to everyone, even those who lack access to art and untouched nature. Moreover, even if the texture of everyday life is such as to yield aesthetic satisfactions

that are relatively subtle, continual awareness of these satisfactions may offer a payoff in quality of life that is very much worth having.

See also AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE; AESTHETICS OF FOOD AND DRINK; DEWEY; ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS; EVOLUTION, AESTHETICS, & ART; POPULAR ARTS; PROPERTIES, AESTHETIC.

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