Everyday Aesthetics

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I

Neglect of Everyday Aesthetics

Our aesthetic life is rich and multifaceted. Its objects range from conventional forms of Western art, such as paintings, music, literature, dance, and theater, to newer art forms, such as happenings, performance, earth art, chance music, installation, and interactive art, not to mention art from non-Western traditions. Aesthetic objects also include nature and environment, popular entertainment provided by television, pop music, movies, sports, and games, as well as daily activities such as eating, walking, and dressing up. Sometimes our aesthetic interests and concerns generate memorable aesthetic experiences, while other times they simply lead to further thoughts, judgments, or actions, without inspiring special moments that stand out from the flow of our daily affairs.

This multifaceted nature of our aesthetic life poses a challenge for defining its distinguishing characteristics. Accordingly, various attempts have been made. Some hold that "the aesthetic" refers to certain qualities, such as gracefulness and forcefulness, which are constituted by, but not reducible to, a set of sensory qualities. Others contend that "the aesthetic" designates a special kind of experience. Yet others claim that it is a specific kind of attitude that renders an experience aesthetic. The notion of "the aesthetic" that I will be using throughout this book encompasses what these existing theories indicate, but much more. In the realm of "the aesthetic," I am including any reactions we form toward the sensuous and/or design qualities of any object, phenomenon, or activity.[1] This means, first of all,

[1] By invoking both the sensuous and design features, I am agreeing with Noël Carroll's "deflationary account" of aesthetic experience, in which "design appreciation and quality detection are each disjunctively sufficient conditions for aesthetic experience." It is because "one could apprehend the aesthetic qualities of a work without scrutinizing its form, or examine the structure of the work without detecting its aesthetic qualities." "Four Concepts of Aesthetic Experience" in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 60. Another reason I specify both is to be able to account for the typical experience of literature, which usually does not involve the

my notion of "the aesthetic" is decidedly not honorific, in contrast to its common usage as well as what many attempts to define the aesthetic imply. As some recent writers point out, our aesthetic life includes not only pleasant, but also unpleasant experiences characterized as depressing, disgusting, or dreary. In my view, the aesthetic further includes reactions toward qualities such as dingy, nondescript, or plain-looking, which may or may not be accompanied by emotionally tinged quality like disgust. My negative, though mild, reaction to a dingy-looking wall, no matter how trivial and unsophisticated, I believe is an *aesthetic* reaction.

This example suggests another way in which my view on the aesthetic expands on the existing theories. I include in the realm of the aesthetic those experiences that stand out from the flow of everyday experiences, aesthetic experience *par excellence* according to traditional aesthetic experience theories. These experiences perhaps constitute the core of our aesthetic life. However, I hold that an aesthetic reaction can also be a seemingly insignificant, and sometimes almost automatic, response we form in our everyday life. It can be our response to everyday phenomena, such as mess and dirt. Furthermore, while aesthetic attitude theories emphasize the contemplative stance toward an object, I am including those aesthetic reactions that do not presuppose or lead to such spectator-like experiences but rather prompt us toward actions, such as cleaning, discarding, purchasing, and so on. Such is typically the way in which aesthetics functions in everyday life, as Arthur Danto points out, when "selecting garments or choosing sexual partners or picking a dog out of a litter or an apple out of a display of apples."[2]

My proposal to expand and diversify the domain of the aesthetic is analogous to Noël Carroll's attempt to encompass different features of

appreciation of the sensuous, such as the visual image of the printed pages or the sound of the sentences (of course excepting many examples of poetry, visual poetry, and literary works written in Japanese). "Design" may not be a typical term used to describe features of literature, but I am using it to include things like character development, plot organization, and the like.

By emphasizing the sensuous and design as the focus of the aesthetic, I am not denying the aesthetic relevance of the conceptual. On the contrary, as my subsequent discussion will illustrate, even the seemingly simple reaction, such as our response to the "unsightly" stain or "dirty" spot on our shirt, upon closer examination, turns out to be dependent upon further conceptual and contextual considerations, though rarely do we recognize, let alone articulate, such cognitive factors. Hence, in my view, although I am identifying the aesthetic with our responses to the sensuous and design, I am not committed to the formalist aesthetics that excludes the cognitive from the realm of the aesthetic.

[2] Arthur Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003), p. 7.

experiences that are illuminated by different theories of aesthetic experience of art, thereby providing "a disjunctive set of sufficient conditions for categorizing aesthetic experiences of artworks."[3] Specifically, according to him,

> a specimen of experience is aesthetic if it involves the apprehension/comprehension by an informed subject... of the formal structures, aesthetic and/or expressive properties of the object, and/or the emergence of those features from the base properties of the work and/or of the manner in which those features interact with each other and/or address the cognitive, perceptual, emotive, and/or imaginative power of the subject.

What I am proposing is to adopt a similar strategy to define the realm of the aesthetic by including not only such aesthetic experiences of art, however broadly defined, but also those responses that propel us toward everyday decision and actions, without any accompanying contemplative appreciation.

Now, among these diverse dimensions of our aesthetic life, there seems to exist an implicit hierarchy that pervades today's academic discourse on aesthetics. Despite the recent inclusion of nature, popular culture, and other aspects of our daily life, the core subject matter of philosophical aesthetics seems to remain Western fine arts. Other objects are almost always discussed in terms of their affinity (or lack thereof) to such art. Even when the discussion focuses on the content, rather than the object, of our experience, the primary interest is an aesthetic experience as something special that stands out from ordinary experience in general. As a result, other dimensions of our aesthetic life that we engage in almost daily, in forming preferences, judgments, design strategies, or courses of action, become neglected.

I find this hierarchical treatment of the diverse aspects of our aesthetic life both problematic and unfortunate for several reasons. First, the theoretically neglected area of our aesthetic life, that is, our aesthetic engagement with the world beyond art, often unaccompanied by a special aesthetic experience, offers a treasure trove of materials for investigation, not provided by art and special aesthetic experiences. Secondly, when we broaden our

[3] Noël Carroll, "Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content," included in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 89. The next passage is also from p. 89.

perspective by adopting a multi-cultural, global viewpoint, we realize that what has been regarded as mainstream aesthetics based upon art and its experience turns out to be specific to, and circumscribed by, the practice primarily of the last two centuries in the West. However, aesthetic concerns and interests, with or without institutionalized art, seem universal. Furthermore, even within a society like ours with an established institutional artworld, as Victor Papanek points out, "it is possible to avoid theatre and ballet, never to visit museums or galleries, to spurn poetry and literature and to switch off radio concerts. Buildings, settlements and the daily tools of living however, form a web of visual impressions that are *inescapable*."[4] Finally, contrary to popular perception that "the aesthetic" deals with something either highly specialized and isolated from our daily concerns, namely art, or else something trivial and frivolous, not essential to our lives, such as beautification and decoration,[5] those neglected dimensions of our aesthetic life do have serious practical ramifications. They often affect and sometimes determine our worldview, actions, the character of a society, the physical environment, and quite literally the course of history.[6] By liberating the aesthetic discourse from the confines of a specific kind of object or experience and illuminating how deeply entrenched and prevalent aesthetic considerations are in our mundane everyday existence, I hope to restore aesthetics to its proper place in our everyday life and to reclaim its status in shaping us and the world.

As a first step of this exploration, in this chapter I will review two major directions of modern Western aesthetics: art-centered aesthetics and aesthetic experience-oriented aesthetics. I shall argue how both directions unduly compromise the rich diversity of our aesthetic life and how this problem not only impoverishes the content of aesthetic discourse but also fails to account adequately for the important ways in which the aesthetic profoundly affects the quality of life and the state of the world.

[4] Victor Papanek, *The Green Imperative: Natural Design for the Real World* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1995), p. 174.

[5] The term "aesthetic" is often used in commercial enterprise dealing with our physical appearance, such as The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, Aesthetic Dental Care, and Aesthetic Rejuvenation Center (taken from my phone book). Larry Shiner, one of the reviewers of the earlier draft, pointed out that in France what we call "beautician" is called "esthétician."

[6] I give some specific examples to illustrate this point throughout the rest of the book.

1. Art-centered aesthetics

i. Art as the model for aesthetic object

I believe it is safe to assume that no aestheticians will dispute the claim that there is no theoretical limit to what can become the object of an aesthetic experience.[7] Except for some things that are extremely dangerous, evil, or physically over-taxing (such as a deafening sound), the catholicity of possible aesthetic objects is generally accepted. Even with respect to those exceptions, either a case can be made for their possibly sublime appeal, or, if they cannot or should not be appreciated aesthetically, the reason cited is usually not aesthetic, but psychological, moral, or physical.

However, it is also commonly observed that in the actual practice of aesthetics, art is almost always regarded as the quintessential model for an aesthetic object. In discussing how the notion of disinterestedness was formulated by the eighteenth-century British aestheticians as a way of defining aesthetic experience in general, Jerome Stolnitz observes that "this catholicity in the denotation of 'aesthetic object'... has gone strangely unremarked."[8] Similarly, Thomas Leddy points out that "although many aestheticians insist that aesthetic qualities are not limited to the arts, even *those* thinkers generally take the arts as the primary focus of their discussion."[9]

These observations are confirmed most notably by the content of standard textbooks used for teaching aesthetics. Many are anthologies with

[7] This point has been stressed by a number of writers, starting with Jerome Stolnitz, whose view represents the so-called aesthetic attitude theory. He holds that "anything at all, whether sensed or perceived, whether it is the product of imagination or conceptual thought, can become the object of aesthetic attention." *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art Criticism*, originally published in 1960, included in *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. John Hospers (New York: The Free Press, 1969), p. 27. The same point is made by Paul Ziff who contends that "anything that can be viewed is a fit object for aesthetic attention," including "a gator basking on a mound of dried dung." "Anything Viewed," originally published in 1984, included in *Oxford Readers: Aesthetics*, eds. Susan L. Feagin and Patrick Maynard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 29 and 23. He reiterates the point by saying: "one can view things in the world aesthetically without being concerned with or inhibited by their lack of status as artefacts."(p. 24). More recently, a number of writers make a point of including nature, popular culture, and life itself as aesthetic objects.

[8] Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness'," originally published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Winter 1961), included in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, eds. George Dickie and R. J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), p. 624.

[9] Thomas Leddy, "Everyday Surface Aesthetic Qualities: 'Neat,' 'Messy,' 'Clean,' 'Dirty,'" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53:3 (1995), p. 259.

obligatory sections on the definition of art, the artist's intention, expression in art, the function of art criticism, interpretation of art, objectivity of aesthetic judgment, as well as issues specific to individual art media. An underlying assumption seems to be that art, however it is defined, provides the model for aesthetic objects, and the aesthetic status of things outside the artistic realm is determined by the degree of their affinity to art. The only topic that takes the discussion beyond art is the notion of aesthetic experience/attitude, but even its treatment, as I will discuss later, implicitly takes our experience of art as the model for aesthetic experience.[10]

This narrowing of the range of aesthetic objects is not unique to philosophical aesthetics, as pointed out by an anthropologist who complains that "progress in the anthropological study of visual aesthetics has been hampered by an undue concentration on art and art objects."[11] In a less academic, yet still educational, setting, our primary and secondary education relegates aesthetic education to specific classes, notably art, music, and to some extent literature. These courses usually adhere to an established practice, by appreciating and analyzing works of art and/or creating objects with those established works of art as their model and guide. For this reason, Paul Duncum makes "a case for an art education of everyday aesthetic experiences," because he believes, and I agree, that "ordinary, everyday aesthetic experiences are more significant than experiences of high art in forming and informing one's identity and view of the world beyond personal experience."[12] This is particularly true for young children, as "for the great majority of children, the many sites of everyday aesthetic experiences outside the world sanctioned by art institutions are likely ... to be even more powerful in forming and informing minds."

I shall call this mainstream tendency of aesthetics "art-centered aesthetics," for it takes art and its appreciation as the core of our aesthetic life. The "art" and its experience that is essential to what I call art-centered

[10] In this regard, *Aesthetics in Perspective*, ed. Kathleen M. Higgins (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996) is noteworthy for its substantial sections on "Beyond Traditional Models," "Popular Culture and Everyday Life," and "Aesthetics around the World."

[11] Jeremy Coote, "'Marvels of Everyday Vision': The Anthropology of Aesthetics and the Cattle-Keeping Nilotes," included in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, eds. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 245.

[12] Paul Duncum, "A Case for an Art Education of Everyday Aesthetic Experiences," *Studies in Art Education* 40:4 (Summer 1999), p. 296. The following passage is also from the same page. As much as I agree with his view, I believe he does not go far enough in his promotion of everyday aesthetic sites. I will take up this point later in this chapter (2. iii).

aesthetics is primarily paradigmatic Western art, such as a Rembrandt painting, a Beethoven symphony, or a Shakespearean sonnet, the typical examples of art enumerated by those who are versed in Western art history. Furthermore, most discussions regarding the definition of art even today take those paradigmatic Western art objects as a starting point to determine how far and in what way the familiar notion of art should be stretched. Of course today's artworld and aesthetic theories have an expanded scope, including newer forms of art, such as James Turrell's *Roden Crater*, Vito Acconci's performance pieces, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles's installation pieces, as well as non-Western art, such as Tibetan monks' sand paintings and Navajo woven baskets. However, rarely are they cited as paradigm examples of art; instead, they are often treated as posing a challenge or an alternative to mainstream paradigmatic art. Later in this chapter (Section iii), I shall explore how this expanded scope of art affects my discussion of art-centered aesthetics; however, my initial examination of art-centered aesthetics will focus on paradigmatic Western art.

What is noteworthy about art-centered aesthetics is that its discussion focuses exclusively on how art objects and their experiences *differ* from other objects and experiences. At the same time, any discussion regarding the aesthetic dimension of non-art objects is almost always conducted by examining to what extent they are *similar* to art. As a result, the aesthetics of non-art objects is typically discussed in terms of whether or not they can be considered art. I believe that this art-centered approach misconstrues the nature of our aesthetic lives, as well as unduly limits its scope.

For example, citing the composition of parts as a characteristic of art, one discussion of food considers whether ordering of various tastes and smells is possible, concluding that "surely there are *some* serial orderings which people have long since noted concerning gustatory and olfactory qualities."[13] Another debate regarding food revolves around whether its temporality, lack of representational content, and inability to "move" us disqualify it from art-hood.[14] Or another inquiry regarding chess as

[13] Marienne L. Quinet, "Food as Art: The Problem of Function," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 21:2 (Spring 1981), p. 167.

[14] Glenn Kuehn develops this debate in his response to Elizabeth Telfer's argument against the art-hood of food. See his "How Can Food Be Art?," included in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). Carolyn Korsmeyer also examines this debate in ch. 4 of her *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

an art form argues that this game satisfies several requirements of art because the players create "something with the intention of rewarding aesthetic contemplation" with "'artistic riches' which are imperishable (... recorded in permanent form, using standard chess notation)." In addition, "originality" is highly prized.[15] As for sports, a pioneering work debates whether "any sport can justifiably be regarded as an art form" and concludes in the negative because the sports' ultimate end, unlike art, is "not to produce performances for aesthetic pleasure." Furthermore, sports cannot "consider ... issues of social concern," such as "contemporary moral, social, political and emotional issues."[16] In contrast, other commentators argue for the art-hood of sports by citing its playfulness and dramatic narrative structure, though improvised like jazz, culminating in a climax or ending with closure, as well as the virtue of graceful, effortless, or economical body movements featured in some.[17] Finally, when arguing for the art-hood of sports, Wolfgang Welsch characterizes its symbolic status and being an end in itself as "distant from ordinary life" and "separate from the everyday world" like art, and claims that "by neglecting the *artlike* character ... we ... fail to understand why it is so fascinating for a large public."[18]

In general, however, non-art objects, not specifically or primarily created for generating aesthetic experience, do not provide coherent design, dramatic tension, or intense expressiveness to the same degree that many works of art do. Consequently, even when they are considered to be art or like art, they are treated as a kind of "wannabe" art or second-rate art, which falls short of those qualities expected in art. Calling this tendency

[15] P. N. Humble, "Chess as an Art Form," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 33:1 (January 1993), pp. 61, 60–61, and 61.

[16] David Best, "The Aesthetic in Sport," originally published in 1978, included in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, ed. William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier (Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1988), pp. 487, 488, and 488. Best is credited for distinguishing art from aesthetics and arguing for the presence of aesthetic qualities in sports while denying their art-hood. He calls attention to "the distinction which is almost universally overlooked or oversimplified, and therefore misconceived, between the aesthetic and the artistic" (p. 487).

[17] For example, see "Sport—The Body Electric" by Joseph H. Kupfer, originally published in 1983, included in Morgan and Meier, Joseph H. Kupfer, "Waiting for DiMaggio: Sport as Drama," Drew Hyland, "'When Power Becomes Gracious': The Affinity of Sport and Art," and Ted Cohen, "Sports and Art: Beginning Questions," all included in *Rethinking College Athletics*, eds. Judith Andre and David James (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

[18] Wolfgang Welsch, "Sport Viewed Aesthetically, and Even as Art?," included in Light and Smith, pp. 142 and 149, emphasis added.

"art chauvinism" when applied to the aesthetics of environment, Yrjö Sepänmaa points out its "danger of putting the environment in second place."[19] Carolyn Korsmeyer also makes a similar point regarding food: "the addition of taste and food to the domain of established aesthetic theory presents problems: both inevitably come off distinctly second rate, trailing the distance senses and fine art."[20] Even those who argue for the art-hood of non-art objects and phenomena, accordingly, often admit that they do not have the same degree of those qualities that make other objects bona fide art. Welsch, for example, concedes that "sport best fills in for the *everyday longings* of art. But it cannot substitute for Schönberg, Pollock, or Godard."[21]

The problem of establishing a mono-framework for aesthetic discourse is not limited to this implied hierarchy. Perhaps more importantly, it impoverishes the scope of investigation by neglecting those features shared by many non-art objects and practices, which tend to disqualify them from being art-like. Such non-art features include absence of definite and identifiable object-hood and authorship, our literal engagement, transience and impermanence of the object, and the primacy of practical values of the object. Typically, either the art-hood of non-art objects is rejected for embodying too many disqualifying features, or their art-hood is established by an argument that, contrary to the first impression, they actually do satisfy requirements for art-hood. In the former case, somehow we are led to believe that rejection from the art-hood renders them aesthetically inferior or impoverished, depriving us of the opportunity for an aesthetic treasure hunt. In the latter case, on the other hand, Sepänmaa warns us that "the environment is easily forced into a foreign mode of observation by raising the similarities to art to a more exalted position than the environment's own system would grant them."[22] In a similar vein, commenting on the art-hood of food, Korsmeyer also cautions that "the concept of art, dominated as it is today by the idea of *fine* art, is a poor category to capture the nature of foods and their consumption. While one earns a bit of stature for food by

[19] Yrjö Sepänmaa, "The Utilization of Environmental Aesthetics," included in *Real World Design: The Foundation and Practice of Environmental Aesthetics*, ed. Yrjö Sepänmaa (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1995), p. 8, and "The Two Aesthetic Cultures: The Great Analogy of an Art and the Environment," included in *Environment and the Arts: Perspectives on Environmental Aesthetics*, ed. Arnold Berleant (Hants: Ashgate, 2002), p. 42.

[20] Korsmeyer, p. 66. [21] Welsch, p. 150, emphasis added.

[22] Sepänmaa, "Two Aesthetic Cultures," p. 42.

advancing it as an art form, the endeavor is apt to divert attention from the interesting ways in which the aesthetic importance of foods diverges from parallel values in art."[23] Either way, these disqualifying characteristics are never explored for their possible aesthetic significance. However, the fact that these features count against something being an art object does not mean that they are aesthetically uninteresting, insignificant, or irrelevant. It is quite the contrary. In the next section, I shall take those salient features of paradigmatic art and illustrate how focusing on them will lead us to overlook other aspects of our aesthetic life, which are equally as interesting and important as those characteristics of art.

ii. Characteristics of paradigmatic art

a. Frame One feature of paradigmatic art is that its ingredients are more or less determined, primarily according to conventional expectations and the artist's control of the material. Painting is confined to the visual elements of one side of the canvas within the frame viewed from a certain distance while standing straight.[24] Its smell of fresh paint, its relationship to the surrounding wallpaper, the back of the canvas, and its upside down view, no matter how intriguing, are to be intentionally bracketed. Our experience of a symphony consists of the sounds conforming to the score created by the musicians on the stage. The outside traffic noise, the cough of the audience, the feel of air-conditioned breeze blowing on our face, and the texture of the seat, are again consciously ignored, though they are part of our experience contemporaneous with the symphonic sound.[25] Despite various controversies regarding what is and is not a part of a work of art, in general, an art object presents itself to us more or less with a determinate boundary. Sometimes the frame is supplied literally as in the frame of a painting, but, more importantly, it is derived from our conceptual understanding such as the conventional agreement concerning

[23] Korsmeyer, p. 141.

[24] For the purpose of the present discussion, I am going to generalize and discount possible counter-examples, many of which are both intriguing and important. To give one example, Paul Ziff considers the possibility of not being able to ignore the surrounding wall, if we are "viewing a yellow version of Josef Albers' *Homage to the Square* displayed in a yellow frame on a yellow stuccoed wall," in "Anything Viewed," p. 27.

[25] John Cage broke away from this convention governing Western classical music by declaring all "noise" is part of his music, illustrated by *4' 33"*. The revolutionary character of his stance and his music underscores the deeply entrenched assumption of what qualifies as musical sounds. I thank Larry Shiner for pointing out Cage's example.

the medium, the artist's intention, the cultural and historical context, and the like.

In contrast, the absence of an equivalent conventional agreement on medium or evidence of the artist's intention renders a non-art object "frameless," making us a creator of it as aesthetic object. As Ronald Hepburn points out, the aesthetic price we pay for the frameless character of non-art objects, such as the lack of a unified design, can be compensated by exercising our imagination and creativity in constituting the aesthetic object as we see fit.[26] For example, the appreciation of a baseball game may include the noisy cheers of the fans, the hot sun beating down our neck, and the smell of hot dogs, in addition to the quasi-artistic elements such as the players' body movements, the thrill of a tight competition, and the drama of the record-breaking home run. Or, New York City's "sense of place" cannot be separated from the smell of burnt pretzels and chestnuts, the feel of vibration and steam coming from below, the chaotic honking of the cabs, though we *can* choose to ignore all of these and concentrate specifically and exclusively on its architecture. In appreciating the smell and taste of green tea, I may incorporate the visual and tactile sensation of the tea bowl, as well as the sound of slurping. In constructing the object of our aesthetic experience in these cases, we do select and specifically attend to certain ingredients in our perceptual field, just as we do when we appreciate art as art. However, in our operations regarding art, the primary criteria for selection are for the most part determined by various factors other than our personal preference, taste, and inclination,[27] while an equivalent conventional or institutional agreement does not exist with respect to non-art. As a result, we are free to rely on our own imagination, judgment, and aesthetic taste as the guide.

[26] "[W]here there is no frame, and where nature is our aesthetic object, a sound or visible intrusion from beyond the original boundaries of our attention can challenge us to integrate it in our overall experience, to modify that experience so as to make room for it. This of course, *need* not occur; we may shut it out by effort of will, if it seems quite unassimilable. At any rate, our creativity is challenged, set a task; and when things go well with us, we experience a sudden expansion of imagination that can be memorable in its own right." Ronald Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty," included in *"Wonder" and Other Essays: Eight Studies in Aesthetics and Neighboring Fields* (Edinburgh: The University Press at Edinburgh, 1984), p. 14.

[27] I am not denying that we do rely on our sensibility, judgment, in constructing the proper object for art appreciation (such as whether to include the title of a painting or the painter's signature as an integral part of the object), but it is constrained by other considerations such as extra-sensory information and conventional agreement.

b. Engagement with the aesthetic object Because of the absence of conventional or institutional agreements concerning how to experience non-art objects and activities, we are also free to engage ourselves literally in the aesthetic experience in any way we see fit. This is in contrast to the prescribed mode of experiencing paradigmatic art. We sit still and quiet during a classical music concert or theater performance, and we look at a painting or sculpture without touching, smelling, moving, or holding it. We are distanced from the object, both literally and metaphorically. Indeed, most of the conventional agreements and institutional settings for experiencing art facilitate such distancing and disengagement from the object, determining *the* proper stance that would induce the optimal experience.

This spectator mode, while most appropriate and rewarding with respect to paradigmatic art, may not provide the most satisfying experience of non-art. We *can* appreciate the aesthetic value of a chair, an apple, a landscape, and rain as if they were a sculptural piece, a landscape painting, or a music piece, by becoming a pure spectator/listener. However, more often than not, we experience a chair not only by inspecting its shape and color, but also by touching its fabric, sitting in it, leaning against it, and moving it, to get the feel for its texture, comfort, and stability.[28] Our typical experience of an apple starts by beholding its perfect round shape and delicate colors ranging from red to green and holding it in our hand to feel its substantial weight and smooth skin. Then we proceed to engage all of our senses and enjoy the crunching sound when we first bite into it, the contrast between the firmness of its contents and the sweet juice flowing from it, and, of course, its smell and taste.[29] A landscape can be looked at from an upside-down position, as recommended for one of Japan's three

[28] We experience a sense of frustration at a museum exhibition of utilitarian objects, where "don't touch" command dominates. Although, as Virginia Postrel points out, art museums are increasingly exhibiting designed objects, such as sneakers, salad bowls, chairs, etc., such exhibits still do not achieve the collapse of the separation between art and everyday life. The primary reason is that as they are items in museum exhibits, we are prevented from experiencing them in our everyday usage by using or wearing them. (See p. 15 of her *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003)) From the perspective of the aesthetic attitude theory, however, it will be questioned whether those considerations regarding their functionality are aesthetically relevant. I will argue below that they are.

[29] I think the experience of eating is one of the most multifaceted experiences we have, *and* ALL of us have them on daily basis. I will address this multi-sensory aspect of eating in Chapter III (2.i) and its moral implications in Chapter V.

scenic places consisting of a sandbar in a bay, or more typically today as a moving panorama from a car window.[30] As for rain, we sometimes experience raindrops falling on our heads as we skip and jump over puddles while "singin' in the rain," feeling our pants and shoes getting wet, as well as savoring the taste of raindrops (hoping that they are not acidic!). Or some other times we may experience rain by sitting under the hanging roof of a Zen temple, looking out on its attached rock garden, attending to the way in which the surface of each rock glistens with wetness and noting the elegant movement of raindrops as they dance downward along the linked chain hanging from the gutter. Yet another way of experiencing a rainstorm is to perch oneself on the treetop in the middle of a forest, as John Muir did in the Sierra Woods.[31] Is one way more "appropriate" or "correct" than others in experiencing rain?

In all these examples, there is no institutional or conventional agreement determining the mode of our experience. The only guide, if we may even call it that, may be in terms of what is aesthetically more rewarding. For example, experiencing a chair or an apple as a piece of sculpture without ever touching and handling it is likely to be less interesting and satisfying than more normal ways of experiencing them.

c. Privileging higher senses The examples of the last two sections indicate another notable feature of Western paradigmatic art: its exclusive reliance on senses of sight and sound. In the Western aesthetic tradition, (successful) art has been variously described as organic unity, a temporal sequence with a beginning, middle, and end, purposiveness without a purpose, significant form, or intensity, complexity, and unity.[32] These definitions of aesthetic achievement all presuppose some kind of composition with

[30] One of the historically designated three scenic places of Japan, Ama-no-Hashidate (Bridge over Heaven) has an associated legend which created this bizarre manner of viewing it. According to the legend, a famed ninth-century poetess, Ono no Komachi, answered the call of nature when viewing this landscape from a hill above and is said to have marveled at the splendid upside down view which looked as if the bridge is over the sky. This episode and the resultant "scenic view" concerning this landscape are explored by Ashihara Yoshinobu in *Zoku Machinami no Bigaku* (*Aesthetics of Townscape II*) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995), pp. 65–74. Following the Japanese custom, I put the last name first for Japanese names, unless the work is in or translated into English.

[31] John Muir recounts his experience of wind storm atop a tree in "A Wind-Storm in the Forests" in *The Mountains of California*, first published in 1894, included in *The American Landscape: A Critical Anthology of Prose and Poetry*, ed. John Conron (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 264–70.

[32] The first two definitions are from Aristotle, the third from Kant, the fourth from Clive Bell, and the last from Monroe Beardsley. I thank Carolyn Korsmeyer for reminding me of Beardsley's view.

parts/ingredients arranged and organized in a certain way. Sight and sound have traditionally been regarded as "higher" senses for their affinity to the conceptual and the intellectual. Visual images and sounds can be arranged according to some rational scheme; hence, they are amenable to objective, sometimes even mathematical, analysis. In contrast, the so-called "lower senses," smell, taste, and touch, as well as kinesthetic sensations are considered to be too visceral, animalistic, and crude to allow intellectual description, conceptual analysis, and rational organization. Monroe Beardsley, for example, compares the senses of smell and taste with sight and sound by citing the formers' lack of enough "order... to construct objects with balance, climax, development, or pattern."[33] This is the reason, he claims, why we do not have "taste-symphonies and smell-sonatas."

It is clear that once we set paradigmatic art of sight and sound as the model for an aesthetic object, we neglect a large portion of the aesthetic dimension of our daily affairs. In addition to this cost to aesthetic theories, what is often not noticed is the fact that denying aesthetic membership to lower senses and bodily sensations has morally problematic consequences. I will explore this less obvious point in Chapter V.

d. The authorial identity Part of the reason why we abide by the framed character of an art object and the conventionally agreed manner of experiencing it is because we suppose that an art object is made by an artist as art. Because of this attribution of an artist/author, a number of specific considerations govern our experience. Because the object came into being at a particular time, with primarily one person responsible for its birth, we cannot but pursue when, where, under what circumstances, and with what sort of intention the object was created. Of course, many non-art objects elicit the same kind of response from us. We look at an ancient monument and try to figure out its meaning, historical context, religious symbolism, and so on. Or, I may be quite fascinated by the romantic writing, both visually and content-wise, of my grandfather's letters to my grandmother on his way to study in Europe, and try to imagine the extent of his loneliness on the boat and affection towards his wife.

[33] Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), p. 99 for both this and the next passage.

However, it is also characteristic of many everyday objects and practices that they lack any particular authorship, making our quest for authorial intention and the circumstances surrounding the creation irrelevant. For example, despite some specific designs created by specific people at a specific time, the current townscape with which I live is a cumulative effect of numerous works and activities over the years, indeed centuries, by both humans and nature. Some of the human contributions may be intentional, such as a town-wide landscaping plan and various restrictions posed by the zoning ordinance, but other aspects of the townscape occurred quite by happenstance, such as the weather-beaten appearance of some buildings, the color pattern created by individual houses' painted walls, the traffic volume which doubled during the past decade, and abandoned stone walls found in the woods. There is no specific point at which this townscape was born; nor is there a specific author or a group of authors whose intention may shed light on its current appearance. This does not mean, however, that the townscape is without aesthetic interest. On the contrary, we often derive a rewarding aesthetic experience deciphering from its sensuous surface a number of things, such as the geological and meteorological conditions, the historical development of the town, its social, economic, and political climate, sometimes even its racial politics, as well as the general ethos of the community. While information pertaining to the town is certainly relevant and helpful, our experience here is not bound by what a particular individual intended the object to function as, be, or mean.

e. Permissibility of modification Our acknowledgement that a work of art was made by an artist leads to another difference between our experience of art and non-art. With respect to non-art, we literally engage ourselves by handling, changing, modifying, or working on many of them. Of course, moral and legal restrictions prevent me from trimming tree branches in my neighbor's yard, spray-painting saints' names on the church wall, or planting exotic flowers in the middle of a national park, no matter how aesthetically motivated these actions may be. However, within these parameters, often guided by aesthetic concerns and interests, we engage with objects around us by cleaning, organizing, mending, rearranging, relocating, and eating on a daily basis.

Now, such modifications are not generally accepted with art objects (except for restoration, although it is accompanied by various restrictions),

even if they are deemed aesthetically desirable. We refrain from eliminating several bars at the end of Beethoven's later symphonies, erasing some pencil marks from a painting, or adding another chapter to a novel.[34] We normally respect the integrity of a work of art and give it precedence over possible aesthetic improvement. And this respect often seems to override the legality of the case because we seem to (or at least wish to) restrict even what the legitimate creator or owner of a work of art can do with his/her creation or property. For example, the whole world was horrified to learn that a Japanese company president, the rightful owner of van Gogh's *Irises*, wished to be cremated with this painting upon his death. Or, more recently, the publishing director of The Modern Library was dismayed to find that Joyce Carol Oates revised her *A Garden of Earthly Delights* extensively for its new hardcover edition.[35]

f. Stable identity Another contrast between art and non-art is the presumed/preferred permanence and stability of the former in contrast to the transience of the latter. Perhaps reflecting the Western metaphysical priority given to permanent and static entities, we regard, and try to keep, art permanent and unchanging. Of course, art objects embodied in physical materials are subject to the same process of change as anything else. A painting gets dirty, its colors fade, and its surface cracks. However, our typical reaction to this natural process of aging, when it concerns art objects, is to try to arrest its progress with cleaning, restoration, preservation, and by providing a temperature-, moisture-, and light-controlled environment.

As for those art objects not embodied in physical materials, such as music, literature, and performance, their interpretation and execution vary greatly from time to time, translation to translation, or performer to performer, creating various debates about what constitutes the authentic performance or the interpretation faithful to the artist's intention. However, despite these variations and questions concerning what constitutes the identity of these art works, we assume that we can identify Beethoven's Fifth Symphony or Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

[34] It is often remarked by music critics that Beethoven's later symphonies suffer from the overly long coda, attributed to his need to repeat the sound as if to compensate for his worsening deafness.

[35] Hillel Italie, "When Authors Rewrite Themselves, It Sparks Debate," *Providence Journal*, 31 July 2003.

Furthermore, art objects are generally atemporal in the sense that the particular temporal context in which they are experienced is normally irrelevant to its qualities and values. The sealed environment of a museum, concert hall, or theater, the typical setting for presenting paradigmatic art, ensures this atemporal nature by obliterating the temporal context of our experience as much as possible. So, it does not matter whether I view Cezanne's *Mt. Sainte-Victoire* in the middle of the summer or winter, during a rainstorm or under a sunny sky, or midday or at night, whereas it makes a *big* difference if I am viewing the actual Mt. Sainte-Victoire.[36]

When we experience non-art objects, we do identify objects in many ways: the corner store, the oak tree in my front yard, my black dress, Old Faithful, my office at school, and so on. However, they are subject to vicissitudes and are always experienced in a certain temporal context which changes the nature of our experience. The time of the day and the year, as well as weather conditions, affect the appearance of my oak tree. The basic structure of my office may stay the same (unless I or the school remodel it), but its content changes constantly—sometimes neatly organized and cleaned while at other times completely messy and disorganized, or I may move the furniture around. As Kevin Melchionne points out in his discussion of domestic aesthetics, "unlike paradigmatic art forms like painting or poetry, interiors do not just sit around after their completion unaltered for the centuries. They are lived in, worked in, and worked on and so they are also transformed, if only by being worn upon daily."[37] Thus, just as the absence of conventional/institutional agreement in the case of non-art allows free range for constituting the object and the manner for facilitating aesthetic experience, the temporal character of our experience outside art also affords numerous possibilities of differing experiences, even regarding the same "object."

g. Aesthetic value and other values Another aspect in which art objects differ from everyday objects and activities is this: fine art objects are created and appreciated primarily for their aesthetic significance, even if they serve

[36] Notable exceptions are outdoor sculpture, particularly those which make use of the outdoor environment with all its changing conditions, such as wind and light, and Japanese Noh theater in its original performing environment—outdoors—which prompted instructions to the actors that they be sensitive to the season and time of performance.

[37] Kevin Melchionne, "Living in Glass Houses: Domesticity, Interior Decoration, and Environmental Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56:2 (Spring 1998), p. 199.

other purposes, such as religious or political. Some literary works and visual art objects affect us and move us profoundly and motivate us to engage in a political activity, change our worldview, or enhance our religious devotion. Some music pieces help promote nationalistic fervor. Furthermore, some of these art objects are specifically intended to have these effects on us. However, rarely do works of fine art affect us most directly on a daily basis, serving our physical needs, changing our environment, and prompting immediate actions.

When it comes to non-art objects, except for pure spectator sports and other forms of entertainment and amusement, most of our everyday objects and activities are created, used, or performed first and foremost for non-aesthetic purposes. We clean our kitchen and bathroom for hygiene, cook and eat food for sustenance, and pick our clothes for protection and comfort. Various utensils, furniture, and tools are created, used, and appreciated for their respective functional use.

We can and sometimes do adopt a disinterested attitude toward these objects and activities by distancing ourselves from the everyday practical concern. Immanuel Kant would claim that this way of appreciating a utilitarian object for its "free beauty" is more legitimate or "pure" than appreciating it for its "dependent beauty," because the former appreciation is based upon the truly free play of the imagination in pursuit of "purposiveness" and is not regulated by a definite "purpose" for which the object is created and used.[38] However, despite the possibility of appreciating the free beauty of a utilitarian object, such an experience is rather unusual, odd, and artificially induced. In our everyday, normal interaction with a utilitarian object, the aesthetic and the practical are experienced as fully integrated and we lose some dimension of its aesthetic value if we surgically remove its functional value.[39]

[38] The section 16 where Kant discusses the difference between free beauty and dependent beauty is entitled: "The Judgment of taste, by which an object is declared to be beautiful under the condition of a definite concept, is not *pure*." *Critique of Judgment*, tr. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1974), p. 65, emphasis added.

[39] Carolyn Korsmeyer pointed out that rearranging furniture is often for solely aesthetic reasons. Although it may be motivated by a purely aesthetic reason (i.e. wanting a different look), we rearrange furniture *as furniture*, rather than as pieces of sculpture. That is, we attend to things like comfort, convenience, and usefulness, along with aesthetic considerations, by making sure there is enough space for us to walk around and for doors and drawers to open, as well as sufficient lighting near a desk, and arranging the seating in a living room conducive to socialization. If we regard furniture as free beauty, we should be able to arrange them in any way possible, such as stacking a chair on top of

The aesthetic value of a knife consists not only of its visual qualities, but also of its feeling in my hand, determined by its surface texture, weight, and balance, but most importantly by how smoothly and effortlessly I can cut an object *because of* the material, shape, length, texture, and weight of the blade and handle. The appreciation here is not simply directed toward the fact that the knife functions well; it rather concerns *the way in which* all its sensuous aspects converge and work together to facilitate the ease of use. If I appreciate this knife *exclusively* for its cutting performance, I don't think I am appreciating it aesthetically, because as long as I can derive the same degree of cutting capability from any other knife, the specific sensuous qualities do not matter. I suspect that the reason why functionality of an object was generally shunned from the realm of the aesthetic is because exclusive attention to functionality steers us away from attending to the sensuous surface of the object. However, considering an object's functionality does not necessarily lead us away from its surface qualities. I can appreciate *the way in which* the materials, design, size, and craftsmanship are integrated to provide the superb functional quality. So, although it is true that various practical and utilitarian purposes are intimately bound up with our everyday experience, such integration does not necessarily compete with the aesthetic value. In fact, I believe it is a mistake to find aesthetic value in everyday objects and activities only insofar as we momentarily isolate them from their everyday use and contemplate them as if they were art objects created specifically for display. If we divorce them from their practical significance in our lives, we will miss a rich array of aesthetic values integrated with utilitarian contexts.

In this section, I have characterized paradigmatic art as a more or less identifiable and stable object bounded by a frame, spatially or temporally, distinct from its surroundings, typically experienced through sight and sound with a spectator-like, distancing attitude, and in a certain expected and a prescribed mode. I have explored several ways in which paradigmatic art and its (proper) experience are governed by various implicit rules and assumptions derived from conventional agreement and other conceptual considerations. In general, the operative mode underlying our paradigmatic experience of paradigmatic art is "separation," "isolation," "distinction,"

a table, if such an arrangement will maximize the overall aesthetic value of the interior space. So, even when this activity is motivated purely by aesthetic reasons, the practical consideration cannot be separated.

"divorce," or "disengagement" from our ordinary everyday affairs. The following passage by John Dewey best characterizes this aspect of art, even if it was initially intertwined with everyday concerns:

> When an art product once attains classic status, it somehow becomes *isolated* from the human conditions under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience. When artistic objects are separated from both conditions or origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with which esthetic theory deals. Art is remitted to a *separate* realm, where it is *cut off* from that association with the materials and aims of every other form of human effort, undergoing, and achievement.[40]

In comparison, non-art objects and practices exist and are experienced in their everyday context and usage. As such, they are free from those expectations and conventions governing the institutional artworld, and in turn can be a source of aesthetic appreciation that incorporates qualities not shared by paradigmatic art, such as their functionality and effects on bodily senses. These considerations lead me to a preliminary conclusion that analyzing everyday aesthetic experiences after the model of Western paradigmatic art is misguided as it compromises their rich and diverse content.

iii. Expanded scope of art-centered aesthetics

So far I have been characterizing art-centered aesthetics as taking paradigmatic Western art as the model for an aesthetic object. This is because many people versed in Western art would readily recognize such objects as art and, despite various challenges and innovations in the past century, they still seem to form a core concept of the artworld.

However, of course there are a number of newer forms of art which are meant to break out of the confinement posed by all these conventional characteristics. Environmental art, happenings, performance, chance music, installation, conceptual art, and interactive art immediately come to mind. Furthermore, some of today's artists quite specifically create works that simulate or *are* a slice of our everyday life. Finally, from today's global perspective and with the eagerness to overcome the West-centric viewpoint,

[40] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricon Books, 1958), p. 3, all the emphasis added.

today's artworld includes a number of non-Western forms of art that do not share those features characterizing Western paradigmatic art. Inclusion of these kinds of art certainly enlarges the domain of art and questions the assumptions underlying the art-centered aesthetic that I have been discussing. I will take three examples, environmental art, art that simulates or is situated in everyday life, and the traditional Japanese tea ceremony, to illustrate how such changes can take place. However, I will also argue that, in the end, even with a more inclusive view concerning art, art-centered aesthetics still does not provide an adequate account of every aspect of our aesthetic life

a. Environmental art[41] Environmental art, initiated as "land art" or "earthworks" by Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, and Michael Heizer in the 1960s and 1970s, challenges those characteristics of paradigmatic art explained above. First, environmental art is for the most part frameless, sometimes denying solid object-hood, as in Robert Morris's *Steam* (1974).[42] But the most prominent examples are so-called earthworks. By taking their art projects outdoors and working directly in, on, or with the land, many land artists resisted the spatial determinacy and self-contained identity of the art object. The art objects cannot be confined to what the artists and their crews constructed. For example, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1972) is not just the spiral mound in a lake, nor are Christo's installation pieces simply a giant orange curtain (*Valley Curtain*, 1970–72), white, fence-like fabric (*Running Fence*, 1972–76), pink plastic (*Surrounded Islands*, 1980–81), yellow and blue umbrellas (*The Umbrellas, Japan–USA*, 1984–91), or a series of orange gates (*The Gates*, 2005). The environment surrounding and accentuated by each constructed object is equally part of these artworks. This is pointed out by two commentators on earthworks:

[41] I present a more detailed discussion of this section in "Environmental Directions for Aesthetics and the Arts1" in *Environment and the Arts: Perspectives on Environmental Aesthetics*, ed. Arnold Berleant (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002). Detailed discussion and visual images of many of the examples I cite in this section can be found in Barbara C. Matilsky's *Fragile Ecologies: Contemporary Artists' Interpretations and Solutions* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), John Beardsley's *Earthworks and Beyond: Contemporary Art in the Landscape* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), *Sculpting with the Environment: A Natural Dialogue*, ed. Baile Oakes (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1995), Sue Spaid's *Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies* (Cincinnati: The Contemporary Arts Center, 2002), and John K. Grande's *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004).

[42] Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis, *Land and Environmental Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), p. 102.

As manipulations of three-dimensional materials in physical space, many of the first projects are sculptures. Yet, executed and sited in a specific location on which they depend for their power, they have the ability to melt and spread beyond the limits of their individual materiality, confusing the traditional sculptural scheme in which the experience begins and ends with the object.[43]

In addition to rebelling against the museum and gallery system entrenched in the modern Western artworld, which treats art objects as commodities subject to commerce, these land artists also offered an alternative model for art by inviting us to exercise our sensibility, imagination, and creativity in constructing our own object for aesthetic appreciation.

Furthermore, environmental art quite often requires our literal participation through bodily engagement, as well as the "lower senses" of touch and smell. Typical examples include Meg Webster's works with living plants, such as *Glen* (1985), inviting touch and exuding scent, and Walter de Maria's *New York Earth Room* (1977) with its striking smell of earth and peat in the middle of a gallery space. Some works by Carl Andre and Mary Miss, as well as James Turrell's *Roden Crater*, create space for the viewers to walk along, walk or crawl through, or lie down.

Environmental art also embraces and thrives on impermanence and transience, sometimes pre-programmed, as in the temporary installation works by Christo, but more frequently resulting from the artist's submission to nature's process, primarily decay and deterioration. Such was the notion of "entropy," defined by Smithson as "the process of transformation which works undergo when abandoned to the forces of nature,"[44] and exemplified by such works as *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970), *Spiral Hill* (1971), and *Spiral Jetty* (1972). Another pioneer earth artist, Michael Heizer, considering as obsolete the notion of the permanence of art, reportedly took "pleasure in publishing photographs of the deterioration of pieces years after they were made."[45]

Nature's processes also include various changes brought about by forces such as wind, light, and temperature, as well as organic growth. Michael Singer and Andy Goldsworthy create intentionally fragile outdoor works sensitive to the effects of nature's force. Singer explains the ephemeral aspect of his works, such as *The Ritual Series* (1970s and 1980s), delicately balanced

[43] Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis, *Land and Environmental Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), p. 16.
[44] Ibid. p. 99. [45] Ibid. p. 29.

tree branches and twigs placed in ponds, that " in order to experience and learn from the natural environment... I felt the need to yield to it, respect it, to observe, learn, and then work with it."[46] Goldsworthy, commenting on his own works, starting with early stick throws and subsequent arrangements of leaves, petals, and pine needles, culminating in works with snow, remarks that art-making activity is his "way of trying to come to terms with the transience of life and not trying to fight that by making always permanent things: to accept and enjoy it."[47]

Some other artists harness nature's growth and maturing process in their works. David Nash's *Ash Dome* (1997–present) relies on the trees' natural growth for its completion, while Agnes Denes's *Wheatfield—A Confrontation* (1982) includes harvesting of the wheat nurtured by the artist and her assistants. Mel Chin's *Revival Field* (1990–93) also consists of various toxin-absorbing plants' growth.

In all of these works, as one commentator observes, the artists are "more concerned with process than with product."[48] While not proposed as a conscious agenda by these artists, their emphasis on the process implicitly challenges the traditional Western ontology which privileges Being over Becoming and may be seen to share an affinity with Taoism and Buddhism. Furthermore, though the authorship of each artwork is specifiable, the actual work results from the collaboration between the artist's contributions and other factors, such as the environment in which the work is situated and nature's force.[49] In short, the artists willingly relinquish total control over their creation.

Finally, in some environmental art works, the aesthetic and the practical are inseparable. Many of today's environmental artists are committed to improving the state of the world in the most literal sense. Various artistic projects to reclaim devastated land constitute one kind. Pioneered by land artists of the 1960s, land reclamation continues to be practiced by more contemporary, ecologically-minded artists such as Nancy Holt, Agnes Denes, Mel Chin, Patricia Johanson, and Helen Meyer Harrison and Newton

[46] Cited by John Beardsley, p. 165.

[47] Recorded in a film directed by C. Guichard, *Nature and Nature: Andy Goldsworthy* (Peasmarsh: The Roland Collection, 1991).

[48] John Beardsley, p. 192.

[49] One of Goldsworthy's books is entitled *A Collaboration with Nature* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990).

Harrison. Whether dealing with toxic landfills or contaminated wetlands, these artists' projects integrate their artistic design, such as geometrical figures or figurative images, with the actual clean-up of the site, as well as the restoration of native plants, providing a habitat for indigenous creatures. Another group of artists attempts to better the world by serving the needs of non-humans. Dubbed "trans-species art," their art objects range from Lynn Hull's raptor roosts in the desert (*Lightning Raptor Roosts*, 1990) and carvings on desert rocks that serve as water containers for birds (*Desert Hydrograph*, 1986–95) to Betty Beaumont's artificial coral reef placed at the ocean bottom to provide habitat for marine creatures (*Ocean Landmark*, 1978–80).

Another kind of environmental art in which the practical significance is inseparable from its artistic value is the engagement in activism. One of the initiators is Joseph Beuys, whose artworks include the project to plant 7,000 oak trees in Germany (1982). Andy Lipkis's *Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. Tree Planting* (1990) involved local residents as volunteers, not only for greening and beautifying an otherwise depressed neighborhood but also for fostering a sense of community pride. Mierle Laderman Ukeles's performance pieces and installation, *Flow City* (1983–90), aimed at raising public awareness of issues regarding garbage. The power of artifacts and activities to change the environment, as well as our daily life, is appropriated in those artworks where the aesthetic values cannot be separated from their effects on real life, blurring the distinction between art and life.[50]

These environmental artworks thus do away with various restrictive characteristics of paradigmatic art; instead, they share more features in common with objects and activities outside the realm of paradigmatic art. This consideration provides a prima facie case for defending an art-centered approach to aesthetics by showing how its restrictive nature can be easily overcome by enlarging the realm of art.

b. Art of the everyday Another example of contemporary art that challenges conventional artworld framework is those objects and performances that simulate or are situated in our everyday life. One example is Rirkrit Tiravanija's installation/performance/interactive piece at Wexner Center for the Arts in Ohio State University, which consists of a life-scale and fully

[50] Aforementioned (note 41) *Ecovention* compiles many good examples of this kind of environmental art.

functioning replica of his East Village apartment where he cooked Thai curry and served it to gallery-goers.[51] He provides not only the literal food for consumption and accompanying aroma but also a space and inviting atmosphere for social interactions among people. Similar to the art of Japanese tea ceremony (which I will take up in the next section), there is no clear boundary for this artwork, audience participation is necessary for the work, it is transient, and it responds to one of our basic needs.

Or, consider sculptor Tyree Guyton's *Heidelberg Project*, four derelict houses in Detroit's run-down section buried in "layers of scavenged materials—tires, hubcaps, broken toys, battered dolls, rusty signs, busted appliances, and automobile parts—all brightened with stripes, polka dots, and random splashes of paint."[52] A giant work of "assemblage art," it was meant as a work of art expressive of his anger toward social, political, and economic injustice. As one can imagine, it created quite a stir among nearby residents as well as art critics, their reactions ranging from outrage over this gigantic "eyesore" to admiration for his artistic courage and defense for his artistic freedom of speech. Unlike the environmental art that I discussed before, which in general is meant to improve the environment, this piece, also situated in an actual, everyday environment, is calling attention to a problem by exacerbating it.

These examples, one an attempt to bring the everyday into a museum setting and the other an attempt to bring a particular brand of art to the everyday context, both aim at blurring the distinction between the sphere of art and everyday life. Having become accustomed to the boundary separating the two, we at first feel disoriented by encountering something in what at first appears to be an inappropriate context. As such, like environmental art, they help enlarge the scope of art.

c. The Japanese tea ceremony Inclusion of non-Western art also helps expand the domain of art. The example I want to discuss, the Japanese tea ceremony, certainly is not intended to challenge the modern Western artworld practice, unlike the previous two examples from contemporary

[51] This and other similar pieces by Tiravanija are discussed in *Supermarket*, ed. Jean-Noël Jetzer (Zürich: Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 1998). I thank my student, Kelsey Harrington, for introducing me to his works and providing the reference.

[52] John Beardsley, "Eyesore or Art? On Tyree Guyton's Heidelberg Project," *Harvard Design Magazine* (Winter/Spring 1999), p. 5.

Western art, having been established as an art form in the sixteenth century. However, like the other two, its various aspects are also characterized by all the features *contrary* to those defining Western paradigmatic art.

First, its boundaries are not definite. Though many of its ingredients are works of art in their own right, such as a tea hut, a tea garden, a tea bowl, a flower arrangement, a scroll, and other implements, the possibility is limitless for including other elements. They include the weather condition, bird's chirping, the sound of rain hitting the thatched roof of the hut, the spontaneous conversation between the host and the guest, the bodily movement of the host making the tea, the smell and taste of the tea and snack, the tactile sensation of the tea bowl and warmth of tea conveyed to the palm, gentle movement of the tea swishing inside the bowl, and the slurping sound when we take our last sip from the bowl. Each participant is free to constitute her own aesthetic object by including some or all of these ingredients. In addition, while there are strict rules governing the minute details for every aspect of the ceremony, the actual ceremony itself is unscripted, subject to the spontaneous convergence of various events and phenomena, and the whole event is made possible with every participant's bodily engagement.

Secondly, this is an art form that specifically celebrates impermanence, as exemplified by its motto: *ichigo ichie* (one time, one meeting). Because of its emphasis on the temporally dependent aspects such as the particular season, the time of the day, the specific assortment of implements to suit the occasion, and the particular make-up of the guests, each tea ceremony is a unique event, never to be repeated. In this sense, it is reflective of the vicissitudes of life itself, illustrating Buddhist insight and heightening our awareness of our own existential predicament.

Finally, it is an art form which consists of the most mundane and practical activity that we all engage in everyday—drinking tea and eating a snack. As the sixteenth-century tea master Rikyū states, the art of tea ceremony resides in "simply boiling water, making tea, and drinking it."[53] In addition, all the objects associated with it are ordinary-looking, sometimes impoverished-looking things, such as *Ido* tea bowls which were originally Korean peasants' rice bowls, and the tea huts which evoke the

[53] *Nanbōroku o Yomu* (*Reading Nanbōroku*), ed. Kumakura Isao (Kyoto: Tankōsha, 1988), p. 350, my translation. *Nanbōroku* is a collection of Rikyū's teachings, most likely compiled by Nanbō Sokei, a Zen priest and one of Rikyū's disciples.

rusticity of peasants' and fishermen's huts. Many implements also show signs of aging, such as chips, cracks, and missing parts, to which our everyday objects are subject. Finally, the guiding principle that dictates how the host and guests should behave is also derived from our everyday concerns—how to treat others with respect and care, how to be receptive to and grateful for others' considerateness, and how to help create harmony and accord among people. Expressed through aesthetic means, the practical, and in this case, moral and social, concerns are thoroughly integrated into this artistic activity.[54]

Thus, inclusion of the tea ceremony also helps enlarge the scope of art and diversify its content. This appears to suggest further that, if there is something problematic about art-centered aesthetics, it is not the theory itself but the scope of its examples; as such, the problem is easy to fix.

d. Limitation of expanded art-centered aesthetics Is it then the case that art-centered aesthetics with an expanded and updated scope can adequately account for everyday aesthetics? Does the inclusion of the foregoing examples in the realm of art help blur the distinction between art and life so that whatever aesthetic considerations that apply to the one apply to the other? I shall argue in this section that art-centered aesthetics, even with this updated and revised scope, is inadequate as an account of all the facets of our aesthetic life. As long as art is conceived as something different from our daily affairs, *even if* it is meant to illuminate or emulate some aspects of our everyday life, it has already acquired a special status, not shared by our everyday life itself.

Let's examine more closely newer art forms exemplified by environmental art and those that simulate everyday life. Whether conventional or revolutionary, art, by its very definition, belongs to and is governed by the agreement, expectation, and convention of the artworld. This is the case even with art objects whose *raison d'être* consists of the challenge to, or denial of, the artworld conventions. As such, these works still exist in an art-historical context and cannot but participate in the artworld. Their very subversiveness, novelty, or irony is possible *only if* they are interpreted within the context of the prevailing practice of the artworld. In contrast, although non-art objects can be expressive of various ideas,

[54] I will pursue such aesthetic manifestations of moral virtues in Chapter V.

values, and qualities (as I will discuss in the rest of the book), they cannot make an "artistic statement" the way that works of art do. Agnes Denes's *Wheatfield* is entirely different from the equivalent wheatfield cultivated by a Midwestern farmer. Its subtitle, "*Confrontation*," is important as it refers to the self-subsisting activity of supplying food source carried out at the most expensive real estate in the world in the shadow of the then-standing World Trade Center twin towers that symbolized globalization of commerce. Joseph Beuys's tree planting performance/activism also differs from other green projects carried out by cities and towns. Though sharing the same farming or planting practice, the resultant landscape, and the care for the environment, Denes's and Beuys's activities, situated at the forefront of the artworld, also carry the connotation of defiance, subversiveness, and unorthodoxy, features which are absent from the farmers' and city workers' identical activities. The significance of eating Thai curry in a museum gallery is also necessarily different from that of eating the same curry in a Thai restaurant or a museum cafeteria. With the former, we cannot but become self-conscious of the fact that we are engaging in a rather un-museum-like activity, which dominates our experience, making the actual taste of the curry not its focus, which *is* the most important dimension of our experience of eating in a restaurant. We are also compelled to reflect critically upon the importance of the mundane and its place in the artworld, which will not happen in the Thai restaurant unless under a very unusual circumstance. So, even when the artwork shares a number of important aesthetic characteristics with non-art objects or activities, an equally significant distinction keeps them separate.

Secondly, by being created outside the museum walls, many recent artworks do make a conscious effort to encourage participation by those who are generally not familiar with the goings-on in the artworld. For example, Christo's *Running Fence* and *Umbrella Project* mobilized the helping hands of area ranchers and village people. His recent installation of orange curtains in New York City's Central Park, *Gates*, was made possible by a number of volunteers, and experienced by numerous people, both residents of the City and the tourists, in their stroll through the park. Guyton's piece involves the passers-by and nearby residents in the debate about what to do about this "eyesore"—to bulldoze the whole thing or to memorialize and preserve it. However, the *art-hood* of these pieces can best be understood and appreciated by those who are familiar with the artworld, many of who

are culturally sophisticated and economically privileged. A farmer may not have knowledge of, access to, or interest in the contemporary artworld. So, he may not be in the position to understand and appreciate fully the artistic meaning behind Denes's *Wheatfield*. But I do not think that there is any denying that he has a rich aesthetic life while working in, on, and with his wheatfield. Though it is rarely articulated, Yi-Fu Tuan points out that "the working farmer does not frame nature into pretty pictures, but he can be profoundly aware of its beauty."[55] The same farmer also encounters numerous opportunities for having an aesthetic experience, making an aesthetic judgment, or acting so as to satisfy his aesthetic inclinations, as he negotiates his daily life by eating, clothing, dwelling, cleaning, working, and dealing with the environment and the fellow community members. Similarly, a Detroit resident not familiar with the history of assemblage art or protest art may condemn Guyton's piece as an embarrassing eyesore disturbing the whole neighborhood. We may be tempted to dismiss such resident's reaction as typical of someone who doesn't understand art, and we may believe that if he were to be educated in the vocabulary of the artworld he may change his mind. However, his negative reaction, which we share in our everyday-life-mode, but not in the artworld-mode, regarding a dilapidated and depressed neighborhood, cannot be dismissed as being uneducated, unsophisticated, and uninformed. No matter how unenlightened, such a reaction *is* still a part, indeed an important part, of our aesthetic life. The Midwestern farmer's and the Detroit resident's experiences are universal, regardless of the existence of an artworld in a particular society and one's participation in it. It seems misleading and unproductive to analyze these kinds of aesthetic experiences deeply rooted and embedded in our workaday existence by applying the model derived from the experience of art, even unconventional ones proximating our daily life.

[55] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 97. Lucy Lippard makes a similar observation about the often unarticulated, yet prevalent, aesthetic experience felt by farmers: "the feeling of farmers and farm workers, who directly experience the land, are rarely articulated from the inside" (*The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicultural Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 141). The same point is also made by a twentieth-century Japanese ethnologist, Yanagita Kunio, who states that "though the farmers clearly experience the beauty of the soybean field, they do not have a need to describe this experience in detail because their whole community shares this feeling in the first place," often expressed in songs to accompany work and folklore. (*Mame no Ha to Taiyō* (*Leaves of Beans and the Sun*) (Tokyo: Sōgensha, 1942), p. 5, my translation.)

As for the tea ceremony, while consisting of the most mundane activities, there is an inherent paradox. A "ceremonious" occasion to savor mundane activities isolates them from the flow of everyday life and environment. First, the tea ceremony literally takes place in a special place, tea hut, surrounded by a tea garden, which functions as a shield from the hustle bustle of daily activities happening right outside. Even when the ceremony takes place in the midst of a metropolis like Kyoto, the process of walking through several gates in the garden and washing one's hands and mouth in the water basin for "purification" contributes to transcending, even for a short while, the worldly activities and concerns.[56] Secondly, the mundane acts involved in the ceremony are highly stylized to express the beauty of economized bodily movement. Thirdly, the extreme care given to the minutest details of the ceremony to achieve the aesthetically appreciable result makes the whole occurrence not our everyday affair in which such fussiness rarely takes place. This ranges from the way in which the host arranges the charcoal in the hearth and the mathematical precision required for the placement of each implement on *tatami* mats (referred to as *kanewari*), to the attention required of the guests to the way in which the wet kettle surface dries with the heat and the scale-like texture toward the bottom of a tea bowl resulting from the insufficient heat when it was fired in the kiln. As a result, during the ceremony, one becomes self-conscious of the mundane quality of the activity and objects, rendering the experience of drinking tea and eating a snack as something special and memorable, standing out from the everyday flow. Although this art form celebrates the mundane, it does so by creating a special setting and occasion for us to contemplate and savor the ordinary.

The same applies to Tiravanija's work. In this case, despite the lack of any special implements or stylized bodily movements as in the case of the tea ceremony, the disconnect from everyday life is paradoxically even more marked, precisely because this mundane activity takes place in the museum gallery, which is heavily invested with conventional agreements (no touching, no eating). Whether or not it is the focus or point of this piece, the initial disorientation we cannot but feel dominates the experience of this piece, and we are made even more aware of the difference between

[56] Horst Hammitzsch summarizes the atmosphere of tea gardens as "far from the world!" *Zen in the Art of the Tea Ceremony*, tr. from German by Peter Lemesurier (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988), p. 85.

our eating experience as a part of a work of art and our everyday eating experience. As Arto Haapala points out, "in the context of art the everyday loses its everydayness: it becomes something extraordinary," and because of that, even with the proliferation of art that uses everyday objects and activities as its theme or content, "all this has contributed to the neglect of the aesthetics of the everyday."[57]

Finally, the ultimate paradox of contemporary art that appropriates, emulates, or aspires to be integrated with the everyday is this. As long as the artists maintain their status as artists and the works' distinction as art, the everyday-ness that they try to capture eludes their works. Their artistic intent of integrating art and life must somehow be communicated to "the audience," the most effective vehicle of which in today's artworld is art criticism, gallery announcement, art books, and documentary film. That is, the existence and survival of such art works *qua art* require publicity using the artworld vocabulary and framework. Otherwise, people will not know that tree-planting projects and derelict houses are works of art. Such is not the case with everyday objects and occurrences. It is true that the economic survival of a Thai restaurant may depend upon a good review by a food critic and the civic participation in tree planting certainly requires advance publicity. However, the food critic's review addresses the quality of food and a local newspaper simply advertises the forthcoming tree-planting project. Neither bestows any special status, other than the fact that the food is good and the tree planting will provide a good opportunity for fulfilling civic duty and environmental responsibility. In the case of art, in addition to such information, the most important message that must be communicated is that eating Thai curry or tree planting constitutes *a work of art*, implying that such artistic status somehow elevates the significance of those activities out of the mundane to something special and privileged. The artist (or the critic) has to announce that it is a work of art, though it is just like, or a slice of, everyday life. This to me poses an inescapable dilemma for the artists trying to capture the everyday in some way.[58]

[57] Arto Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place," included in Light and Smith, p. 51.

[58] I thank Larry Shiner for suggesting the point of this paragraph. The same kind of dilemma plagues many environmental art projects that are integrated with various pragmatic concerns, such as environmental, political, and scientific. For example, NEA funding was initially denied to Mel Chin's *Revival Field*, a project to clean up a toxic site with the use of plants, because the committee failed to see how it is art and not simply a science project. Many other projects, such as Betty Beaumont's *Ocean*

When taking place in an everyday setting or illuminating an everyday activity, art may certainly change our attitude toward our everyday life by highlighting the special qualities of the mundane, or in the words of E. H. Gombrich, "the marvels of everyday vision."[59] How could anyone not see the landscape of rolling hills differently after their contour was accentuated by Christo's white curtain? How can we not derive a special joy and wonder when making a snowball after seeing Goldsworthy's works? And how can we not savor the seemingly innocuous cup of tea once we participate in a tea ceremony? Though characteristically overstated, Oscar Wilde's dictum that nature and life imitate art contains truth,[60] and these more recent and non-Western art forms that I have discussed confirm his claim more effectively than Turner's paintings and the realists' novels that Wilde cites. So, there is no denying that various art objects help us attend to our everyday life aesthetically, making our aesthetic life richer.

However, I maintain that the content of our aesthetic life is even more diverse and multifaceted than what can be captured by art-centered aesthetics, even with an expanded scope. The aesthetic dimension of our life which is deeply embedded in our everyday affairs, while it can be influenced by art, operates quite independently from our experience of art. Virginia Postrel cautions us that "while 'art' can certainly be a meaningful category, it can also be deceptive, forcing sensory value into a transcendent ghetto *separated from the rest of life*."[61] The civic act of tree-planting, the appreciation of wetland reclamation, and the pleasure of having tea during my break from work or sharing a Thai curry with good friends at a restaurant are different from Beuys's project, Johanson's creation, the Japanese tea ceremony, and Tiravanija's work, because with the latter we cannot but be conscious of our participation in an art work, and its artistic import within the respective art practice and history. Art, whatever its designation, no matter how inclusive that notion becomes, and even when its intent is to blur the distinction from life, is necessarily characterized as an *exception to* or *commentary on* everyday objects and affairs. As such, accounting for the

Landmark, is inaccessible because it exists at the bottom of the ocean, hence requiring documentation by divers.

[59] Cited by Jeremy Coote, in Coote, p. 245.

[60] Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying*, first published in 1889, included in *Critical Theory since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971): 672–86.

[61] Postrel, p. xiii, emphasis added.

nature of aesthetic object and experience in general by applying the model of art experience thus remains inadequate and misleading.[62]

e. Obliteration of the concept of art At this point, we may consider those cultural traditions which do not provide a special place or status for art because every facet of life is conducted with artistic sensibility. In such cultures, everyone is an artist and every activity is an artistic activity in the sense that it is practiced with utmost care, skillful execution, and in pursuit of excellence and beauty. As Arnold Berleant points out, "the custom of selecting an art object and isolating it from its surrounding ... has been ... most pronounced since the eighteenth century, with its aesthetic of disinterestedness. Yet it is at variance with the ubiquity of the aesthetic recognized at other times in the West and commonly in non-Western cultures."[63] For example, Melvin Rader and Bertram Jessup point out that the Balinese have a saying: "We have no art, we do everything the best way we can."[64] Or, according to Gary Witherspoon, "nearly all Navajos are artists and spend a large part of their time in artistic creation," and "Navajo artists integrate their artistic endeavor into their other activities," because "art is a way of living."[65] Similarly, Victor Papanek, a designer himself, praises the Inuit people as the world's best designers because, just like the Balinese and the Navajos, everybody is an artist in the sense that "a man should do all things properly."[66] Finally, the Japanese court culture during Heian period (794–1185) exemplifies aestheticism regarding everyday objects, phenomena, and activities beyond what can be identified as art. Dubbed "the cult of beauty," aesthetic concerns extended to letter

[62] By the same token, Carolyn Korsmeyer pointed out that transferring the aesthetic properties of the everyday to art is also misleading. For example, the properties of being fertile and productive applicable to the farmer's wheat field are not straightforwardly transferable to Denes's piece, even if it is indeed productive. Because of the political sub-text of her work, the artistic quality will be something like "low-tech and local productivity defiantly self-assertive in the shadow of hi-tech globalization." Furthermore, as the ensuing debate over Guyton's project indicates, while a derelict house that resulted from total neglect and poverty is aptly characterized as an "eyesore," if it is a work of art, as his piece is, it is questionable whether this characterization (without any qualification) will be appropriate and faithful to its artistic integrity.

[63] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p. 157.

[64] Melvin Rader and Bertram Jessup, *Art and Human Values* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976), p. 116.

[65] Gary Witherspoon, "Navajo Aesthetics: Beautifying the World through Art," included in Higgins, p. 737.

[66] Papanek, p. 233.

writing, color combination of many layers of kimono and how to show its bottom from behind a screen, and the manner of bidding farewell after a night of love-making.[67]

If we were to enlarge the domain of art to include these cultural practices, it essentially amounts to abandoning the art-centered aesthetics that I have been reviewing. If everyone is an artist and everything is art, then those features which characterize art, whether of paradigmatic Western art or including contemporary Western art and non-Western cultural practices, will lose relevance because there will be no distinction between art and non-art. This will signal the demise of art-centered aesthetics. It may be the case that some of the aforementioned art works that simulate our everyday life indicate the artworld's aspiration to move our society closer to those cultural practices.

Now, I certainly welcome and endorse widening our scope of aesthetics by adopting a multi-cultural and global mode of exploration. Exposing ourselves to cultural practices and values different from what we have been accustomed to and taken for granted helps us realize the parochial nature of the modern Western notion of art and of the institutions of the artworld. However, the problem with examining our (contemporary Western) aesthetic life with the help of anthropologists' and historians' accounts of those aesthetic practices unfamiliar to us is that it gives an impression that the only way to acknowledge our multifaceted aesthetic life is to assimilate or proximate those unfamiliar cultural or historical traditions. It appears to imply that the everyday dimension of aesthetics thoroughly integrated with the flow of workaday activities is either unnoticeable or absent from our life *until* or *unless* we adopt a different cultural perspective. But, our aesthetic life in the everyday context is *already* rich and familiar to us. I do not think that we need to exoticize its content; nor should we have to become experts in Balinese, Navajo, Inuit, or Heian traditions or adopt their worldviews in order to investigate the heretofore neglected aspects of our everyday aesthetic life. Instead, I suggest that we acknowledge the already diverse and rich dimensions of our aesthetic life and the fact that we

[67] The term "cult of beauty" is taken from Ivan Morris's discussion in *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994). For the best original source of the Heian aesthetic sensibility, see *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*, written toward the end of the tenth century, ed. and tr. Ivan Morris (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982). I shall explore this aesthetic sensibility further in Chapter V.

have not unearthed those treasures because of our persistent adherence to art-centered aesthetics. We need to grant and respect the independence of those wider aesthetic aspects from art-relevant considerations and examine their content on their own terms.

2. Special experience-based aesthetics

i. Aesthetic attitude and aesthetic experience

The limited scope of art-centered aesthetics which takes art works as the model for the aesthetic object may suggest that it is much more promising to start with our attitude and experience in exploring difference facets of our aesthetic life. After all, those who hold the aesthetic attitude theory are also the ones most vocal about the ubiquity of what can be an aesthetic object. Whether proposed as a distinct attitude on our part, such as distancing or disinterestedness, or a special experience referred to as an aesthetic experience, the core of aesthetics, according to this alternative, consists of features of our experience rather than of objects.

I believe that most of us have had an aesthetic experience through adopting a disinterested attitude when attending (properly) to a paradigmatic art, or through some unexpected, dramatic break from our humdrum experience facilitated by what Edward Bullough would describe as "distancing."[68] I have had my share of experiences akin to the boat passenger's experience of the fog at sea Bullough relates, leaving an indelible mark on my memory, and I believe that I am not unique in this regard. Although it happened when I was a young child, I still remember the breathtaking view of Bihoro Pass in the Akan National Park located in Hokkaidō, the northern island of Japan, when its wide vista of green hills dotted with evergreens extending downward suddenly appeared after a long bus ride through a series of mountains. Before the vista opened up, I was tired of the bus ride, perhaps a little car sick or hungry, thinking about when we are going to get to the hotel, but the opening up of this spectacular landscape made me forget all of this. Another unforgettable experience concerns the feeling of being struck by a kind of lightning when I first

[68] Edward Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," *The British Journal of Psychology* 5 (1912–13): 87–118.

heard a Brahms intermezzo at my piano teacher's studio as a high school student while waiting anxiously for my lesson; it was like falling in love at first (sight) sound. In both cases, I would describe my experience as "out of gear" from the normal consciousness and being transported to another dimension, where nothing but the view or the melody mattered. It stood out, separated from what went before and after.

John Dewey would most likely describe each experience as "having *an* experience," because each formed a sort of self-contained unit, "demarcated ... from other experiences," "complete in itself; standing out because marked out from what went before and what came after."[69] Within this unit of experience, each moment leads to the next without any distraction or dispersion, cohering as a completed whole with "unity ... constituted by a single *quality* that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts."[70]

Bullough's notion of distancing and Dewey's notion of "an" experience are normally not regarded together; if anything, Dewey's view can be taken as a challenge to disinterested or distancing attitude theory because he did not believe that the aesthetic and the practical were mutually exclusive. However, I am treating their theories as comparable insofar as they both distinguish an aesthetic experience from non-aesthetic experiences by the features of the experience itself, not by its object. After all, Bullough's model example is fog experienced as a boat passenger and Dewey's examples are dominated by mundane events and activities, such as eating a meal, conducting a job interview, or solving a math problem. In this regard, both views account for a wider range of aesthetics than art-centered aesthetics.

However, I maintain that their views are also still too restrictive. What is common to these theories is that the aesthetic (qua experience) is something which contrasts with the humdrum of everyday experience. For Dewey, such "humdrum" and "slackness of loose ends" are "the enemies of the esthetic."[71] Against such a background, the aesthetic experience is described as a kind of encapsulated unit that is hermetically sealed off from our ordinary engagement with daily life. Bullough characterizes it as "a momentary switching on of some new current," or "the cutting-out of the practical sides of things and of our practical attitude to them."[72] Just as art

[69] Dewey, pp. 35 and 36. [70] Ibid. p. 37.
[71] Ibid. p. 40. [72] Bullough, both from p. 89.

is necessarily defined as an *exception* to the everyday objects, the aesthetic experience conceived as a special experience is also an *exception* to the everyday experience, according to these views.

ii. Limitation of special experience-based aesthetics

While not denying the existence or importance of aesthetic experiences which stand out from our everyday affairs, I do not believe that they can fully and adequately account for many aspects of our aesthetic life. One reason is that these experiences are distinguished from other kinds of experiences by their infrequency. The following description of a distanced experience by Bullough implies that these experiences are few and far between:

> This distanced view of things is *not*, and *cannot be*, our *normal* outlook. *As a rule*, experiences *constantly* turn the same side towards us, namely, that which has the strongest practical force of appeal. We are *not ordinarily* aware of those aspects of things which do not touch us immediately and practically ... The *sudden* view of things from their reverse, usually unnoticed side, comes upon us as a *revelation* ...[73]

Similarly, Dewey regards "*an* experience" as a rare occurrence. He characterizes the ordinary, non-aesthetic experience as either "the loose succession that does not begin at any particular place and that ends ... at no particular place" or "arrest, constriction, proceeding from parts having only a mechanical connection with one another," and claims that "there exists *so much* of one and the other of these two kinds of experience."[74]

The impression we get from both accounts is that we have to be lucky for an aesthetic experience to occur, but neither of them make clear whether we can succeed in having an aesthetic experience if we consciously and methodically set out to do so. Jean-Paul Sartre, speaking as Roquentin in *Nausea*, probably would deny such a possibility, except in subsequent "recounting" of the experience which we can structure according to a narrative form of organic unity. In addition to the existential revelation about the *raison d'être* of his existence in this world, Roquentin also comes to realize that "there are no adventures—there are no perfect moments,"[75] both similar to the Deweyan aesthetic experience. They

[73] Ibid. pp. 89–90, all the emphasis added. [74] Dewey, p. 40, emphasis added.
[75] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, tr. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 150.

can be experienced only by telling a story about it, but it cannot happen together with "living."[76] Our ordinary living is humdrum, just as Dewey describes it: "Nothing happens while you live. The scenery changes, people come in and go out, that's all. There are no beginnings. Days are tacked on to days without rhyme or reason, an interminable, monotonous addition."[77] An adventure, on the other hand, is organized with a distinct and necessary order, without requiring an extraordinary event. A perfect moment, which Roquentin and his former girlfriend try to create without success, is where "there are certain acts which *have to be* done, certain attitudes to be taken, words which *must* be said—and other attitudes, other words are strictly prohibited."[78] In short, it is like "a work of art," which for Roquentin is an organic unity governed by internal necessity.[79]

We may not want to go so far as Sartre in denying the possibility of having an aesthetic experience while undergoing the actual experience, but the account given by the aesthetic attitude theorists and aesthetic experience theorists certainly indicates that an aesthetic experience is a rarified occasion and occupies only a small, though memorable, portion of our life. Part of the reason may be that, for those aesthetic attitude or experience theorists, a special aesthetic experience results from *successful achievement*, brought about by the object and our interaction with it.

However, what about the cases in which we *fail* to achieve such a special experience due to some facts about the object or our response, or both? Or, more importantly for my purpose, what about those cases in which we form an opinion, make a decision, or engage in an action guided by aesthetic considerations without invoking any special experience? For example, most of us attend to our personal appearance almost daily: choosing what to wear and what sort of haircut to get, cleaning and ironing clothes, and deciding whether or not to dye our hair or try some kind of "aesthetic rejuvenation" treatment or body decoration. These decisions and actions are primarily, if not exclusively, guided by

[76] Cf. "for the most banal event to become an adventure, you must (and this is enough) begin to recount it. This is what fools people: a man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his own life as if he were telling a story. But you have to choose: live or tell." (Ibid. p. 39)

[77] Ibid. [78] Ibid. p. 148, all the emphasis added.

[79] Ibid. Roquentin's model for a work of art with organic unity is an old rag-time with a vocal refrain in which each note and the order among them are governed by necessity and inevitability (see pp. 21–2 for his description of this music).

aesthetic considerations.[80] We also involve aesthetic considerations when dealing with our possessions. In addition to economics and functionality, aesthetics often plays a crucial role in our purchasing decisions. Furthermore, aesthetic judgments guide us when choosing the paint color for the house, planting flowers in the yard, cleaning and tidying rooms, removing rust spots from the car and painting them over, maintaining a weeds-free, velvety-smooth, uniformly mowed lawn, replacing shabby-looking drapes, and reupholstering a threadbare couch.[81] Finally, beyond personal decisions, as citizens, we find ourselves forming opinions on societal debates primarily based upon aesthetic reasoning. Examples range from supporting the rehabilitation of a brownfield, criticizing the design of a proposed building, opposing the construction of a wind farm or a cell phone tower, to condemning graffiti while welcoming a mural and objecting to the appearance and location of a billboard.[82]

I believe these examples are quite familiar to most of us. However, many of us, even aestheticians among us, seldom stop and reflect upon the aesthetic reasons and concerns behind these decision and actions. Besides the fact these experiences have nothing to do with art, another reason for their relative neglect is that they normally do not engender a special,

[80] Besides aesthetic considerations, our decisions regarding these items may be motivated by non-aesthetic reasons, such as health and hygiene. The irony is that sometimes aesthetic interests can jeopardize health issues, as in some cases of "rejuvenation" treatment provided by plastic surgery, and body decoration, such as body piercing, tanning, and tattooing. The ultimate consideration guiding decisions regarding personal appearance may be self-expression or desire to impress or shock others, but that does not make the decisions non-aesthetic because such desire is carried out *through aesthetic means*.

[81] Carolyn Korsmeyer questioned whether the reasons for these decisions may not be extra-aesthetic. It is true that I may maintain a nice-looking lawn to impress my neighbors, ensure the property value of my house, or avoid being fined for violating the town ordinance that dictates the length of the grass. I may also remove rust spots from my car because I am worried that, if left untreated, they may eventually eat away the body of the car or because I want to whip the car into shape before selling it as a used car. So, there can be a number of diverse non-aesthetic immediate motivations that prompt me into certain decisions and actions. However, what is important for my purpose is that these issues all stem from the aesthetic response, whether of a prospective buyer, a neighbor, or a town official, regarding the sensuous appearance of the "messy" yard and "shabby-looking" car.

[82] In a recent report on the town of East Greenwich, RI, town officials successfully combated vulgar graffiti by inviting those "graffiti artists" to paint something artistic instead. To everyone's amazement, the resultant artistic spray-painted "graffiti" were never defaced (Andrew C. Helman, "E. Greenwich is Fighting Graffiti with Art," *Providence Journal*, 3 August 2003). It is true that these debates often involve non-aesthetic issues as well, such as economic development, environmental impact, reduction of crime, and safety issues. My point regarding these examples is not that the debates are exclusively about aesthetic matters but rather aesthetic issues are one of the important ingredients of these debates. A good discussion of these aesthetic issues on the societal level can be found in *Aesthetics, Community Character, and the Law* by Christopher J. Duerksen and R. Matthew Goebel (Chicago: American Planning Association, 1999).

distinct experience disconnected from, and standing out from, our everyday affairs; hence, they generally lack memorable presence or lofty intellectual, emotional, or spiritual enlightenment. As a result, they tend to disappear from the aesthetic radar that has been calibrated to capture those special, standout experiences.

iii. Everyday life ordinarily experienced

But, are there good reasons for excluding this aspect of aesthetic life thoroughly integrated with everyday life from serious examination? Does the fact that it does not normally involve special aesthetic experience make it unworthy of investigation?

From a psychological point of view, it is understandable that we attend more readily to those events, occasions, and experiences that stand out from the familiar and ordinary, and neglect the daily humdrum with its commonplace, ordinary, mundane, and routine character. This discrimination against the ordinary and inconspicuous is all-too-familiar. Consider, for example, the two approaches to history. One is more familiar to many of us: the great man theory of history which constructs a narrative out of what is usually regarded as the movers and shakers of history, such as kings, emperors, and generals, and landmark events, such as battles, the birth of a nation, and the promulgation of a law. For many of us, this is the kind of narrative we recognize and are taught as history. This approach of weaving a historical account by concentrating only on the mountain peaks, however, tends to ignore the valleys and foothills that support and give rise to mountain tops.[83] So the alternative approach, often provided to supplement the great man account of history, is to focus instead on things like material culture, vernacular history, and common folks' lives.[84] In fact, Judy Attfield defines "the everyday" as

[83] It is interesting to note that Dewey uses the mountain metaphor in describing his task of re-integrating art into our life: "This task is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience. *Mountain peaks do not float unsupported.*" (Dewey, p. 3, emphasis added.)

[84] A noted Japanese ethnologist, Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962), championed the notion of *jōmin*, common folks or ordinary people, by calling attention to the often-unrecognized contributions their everyday life makes to the direction of history. What is interesting about his theory for our purpose is that he also emphasizes the importance of common folks' experience and appreciation of their workaday landscape, which is often eclipsed by the mainstream, artistic appreciation of scenic landscapes.

"that which does not get recorded in the history made up of important 'events.' "[85]

Our landscape appreciation also offers an example of the dramatic eclipsing the ordinary and the everyday. We are surrounded by some kind of landscape all the time, ranging from our yard, the streets around us, a shopping mall with a huge parking lot around it, office buildings facing concrete pavement, to the beach we walk on during our evening walk and the salt marsh which buffers the sandy beach from the road. However, more often than not, landscape "evokes images of snow-capped mountains and waves beating on a rock-bound coast," or "amusing-looking rocks and picturesque scenery formed by natural processes such as volcanic and water activities and weather conditions."[86] The quintessential examples of "landscape" are scenic, natural landscapes typified by early national parks in the United States or designated scenic sites in the Japanese tradition.[87] Celebrated by various arts and advertised for promoting tourism, those scenic wonders garner our attention and interest, despite the fact, as Arnold Berleant reminds us, "these temples of nature are rarely a part of the ordinary landscape of daily life... For most people, the lived, the living landscape is the commonplace setting of everyday life."[88]

Thus, whether regarding history, landscape, objects, or experiences, the ordinary and mundane that are often overlooked need to receive equal attention as the dramatic and extraordinary. One strategy to promote such attention is to render "the familiar" strange, to borrow Arto Haapala's terms (although he himself is at best ambivalent about this strategy). According to him, "strangeness creates a basis for sensitive aesthetic appreciation" and "art is presented in contexts that create strangeness, and the tendency in aesthetics has been to maximize strangeness and to minimize familiarity."[89] This is true of art that represents or deals with a slice of everyday life, such

[85] Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 50.

[86] The first passage is from Peirce F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. D. W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 12. The second is from Satō Kenji, *Fūkei no Seisan, Fūkei no Kaihō: Media no Arukeorogī* (*Construction of Landscape, Liberation of Landscape: Archaeology of Media*) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1994), p. 169, my translation.

[87] I explored the three scenic landscapes of Japan in "Scenic National Landscapes: Common Themes in Japan and the United States," *Essays in Philosophy* 3:1 (January 2002).

[88] Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1997), p. 16.

[89] Haapala, p. 50.

as the street photography of Cartier-Bresson, cited by Haapala, and Aaron Siskind's close-up photographs of peeling paint and stained walls.

This strategy of sharpening our aesthetic sensibility by experiencing aspects of the everyday as "strange" or "special" is quite prevalent outside art and aesthetics discourses as well. For example, Yi-Fu Tuan, a cultural geographer, observes "how rarely we attend to the world aesthetically," though "alert individuals do, glancingly, during the pauses and among the interstices of practical life."[90] Such alertness affords us small aesthetic pleasures in the midst of everyday life:

> When I vacuum the carpet and create neat swathes of flattened fibers, when I look at a cleanly typed page, when the plowman strives to produce a straight furrow or the carpenter looks at the joints in his woodwork with a sense of pride, there is necessarily an aesthetic tinge to the satisfaction. All these activities are attempts to maintain or create small fields of order and meaning, temporary stays against fuzziness and chaos, which can be viewed, however fleetingly, *with the pleasure of an artist.*

I do agree that a part of the goal of everyday aesthetics is to illuminate the ordinarily neglected, but gem-like, aesthetic potentials hidden behind the trivial, mundane, and commonplace facade, and I explore some of them in the subsequent chapters. However, by making the ordinary extraordinary and rendering the familiar strange, while we gain aesthetic experiences thus made possible, we also pay the price by compromising the very everyday-ness of the everyday. Haapala acknowledges this paradox by observing that "ordinary everyday objects lack the surprise element or freshness of the strange, nevertheless they give us pleasure through a kind of comforting stability," and that "the aesthetics of everyday familiar surroundings and the aesthetics of the strange have their own roles in human life."[91] However, even with this recognition, Haapala still seems to be wedded to defining the aesthetic as something pleasurable, as he goes on to claim that "we should simply become more aware of the pleasurable aspects of the everyday without making them objects of aesthetic appreciation in the traditional sense."

If nurturing this awareness of the neglected, but familiar, aesthetic gems of everyday life is an important mission of everyday aesthetics, which

[90] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture* (Washington, D. C.: Island Press, 1993), p. 101. The next passage is from p. 100, emphasis added.

[91] Haapala, pp. 50 and 51. The next passage is from p. 52.

I believe it is, I also believe that it is equally important to illuminate those dimensions of our everyday aesthetic life that normally do not lead to a memorable, standout, pleasurable aesthetic experience *in their normal experiential context.* Our usual reaction to dilapidated buildings, rusted cars, or dirty linens is to deplore their appearance, prompting us to repair, clean, or discard them, in the absence of some other overriding considerations. Such reactions are primarily, if not exclusively, *aesthetic* reactions. As Judy Attfield argues, everyday aesthetics should not be equated with bringing "low" or "pop" culture into a critical discourse. "Everyday things have nothing to do with the 'low' aesthetic of 'high/low' culture that has allowed the popular to infiltrate the prestigious art gallery in order to affiliate it to art."[92] Instead, "what happens in the commonplace is mainly a matter of common sense. Such activities can be thought of as trivial but they do constitute independent acts and as such represent a significant part of the make-up of the everyday world—the commonplace." In this regard, while I agree with Paul Duncum's "case for an art education of everyday aesthetic experience," I don't think he goes far enough, as his notion of the "characteristic sites of everyday aesthetics include environments such as theme parks, shopping malls, city streetscapes, and tourist attractions, as well as mass media images especially on television and now on computer screens."[93] These sites certainly constitute an important part of our everyday aesthetics, but many are still primarily environments that we "visit" and the images that we behold, rather than those environments and objects with which we work or live every day in the most literal sense. With the emphasis on a special aesthetic experience as a defining feature of our aesthetic life, even including those things from "low" or "popular" culture, I am afraid we still neglect the kind of experience that is all-too-familiar to most of us. In this regard, I agree with the following observation by Tom Leddy:

> It would seem that we need to make some sort of distinction between the aesthetics of everyday life ordinarily experienced and the aesthetics of everyday life extraordinarily experienced. However, any attempt to increase the aesthetic intensity of our ordinary everyday life-experiences will tend to push those experiences in the direction of the extraordinary. One can only conclude that there is a tension within the very concept of the aesthetics of everyday life.[94]

[92] Attfield, pp. 50–51. The next passage is from p. 89. [93] Duncum, p. 295.
[94] Leddy, p. 18.

This tension he speaks of, however, can be partly resolved if we pay attention to our typical aesthetic response to everyday objects and phenomena, such as eyesores, which often prompts a certain decision or action. My point is that this kind of experience is as much a part of our aesthetic life as a special standout, extraordinary, "strange" experience.

But why is it so important, if it is indeed important as I believe, to attend to ordinary objects and environments "ordinarily experienced"? Is such an investigation valuable for its own sake? One of the main theses of this book is that such seemingly trivial, innocuous, ordinary, mundane, or even frivolous aspects of our aesthetic life do have surprisingly serious, pragmatic consequences: environmental, moral, social, political, and existential. For example, as I will explore in the next chapter, our relative neglect of workaday environments in favor of remote, dramatic, scenic environments does have dire consequences, because people's attitude and societal policies regarding protection of landscape are significantly affected, sometimes determined, by such aesthetic considerations. Furthermore, everyday environments and objects with which we interact every day cannot but exert substantial impact on our lives. As Berleant reminds us, "how we engage with the prosaic landscapes of home, work, local travel, and recreation is an important measure of the quality of our lives."[95]

I am in no way minimizing the profound effect art and special aesthetic experience can have on our lives. Nor am I denying the value and importance of examining their nature, as traditional aesthetic theories have done. What I do find problematic is to allow the significance of the dramatic aesthetic experience to eclipse the other aspects of our aesthetic engagement with the world and life. By neglecting the other aspects of our aesthetic life which is embedded in our everyday judgments, decisions, and actions, we lose not only the opportunity for enriching the dimension of aesthetic inquiry, but also the potential for improving the quality of life and the world. Hence, I am proposing to steer the aesthetic inquiry away from the art-centered and special, experience-oriented approaches that have dominated the modern Western aesthetic discourse. I am not invalidating those approaches, but rather supplementing them; I want to be faithful to the diverse ways in which we engage with the diverse aspects of the world aesthetically. I believe that we have more to gain by

[95] Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, p. 16

recognizing and appreciating the diversity within our aesthetic life than applying a mono-theory of art-centered aesthetics or special experience-oriented theory to different aspects of our aesthetic life. That is, by analyzing our aesthetic experiences outside art on their own terms rather than as proximate or "wannabe" art experiences, we can unearth a wealth of aesthetic issues that are not shared by, or relevant to, our experience of art. Similarly, by exploring the mundane everyday judgments and actions motivated by seemingly trivial aesthetic preferences, we can come to appreciate the ways in which our lives and the world are profoundly affected by aesthetic concerns, different from the way in which art or memorable aesthetic experiences exert their impact on our lives and the world.

For the rest of the book, I will explore some of the aesthetic judgments that we often make in our daily lives, many of which affect our worldviews, society, and the world. I will illustrate how those seemingly insignificant everyday aesthetic preferences and decisions can have serious environmental, moral, social, political, and existential implications. The format of investigation is decidedly exploratory, rather than argumentative, because my whole point is to address the dimension of our aesthetic life hitherto neglected in the academic discourse. I want to characterize what follows as a kind of adventure into the most familiar (because it deals with facets of our daily lives), yet very unfamiliar (because it has not received adequate academic attention) territory.