

1-1-2014

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Accepted version. "Introduction to Aesthetics of Everyday Life: East and West," in *Aesthetics of Everyday Life: East and West*. Eds. Liu Yuedi, Curtis L.Carter. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014: vii-xvii. [Publisher link](#). © 2014 Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Used with permission.

Introduction to *Aesthetics of Everyday Life: East and West*

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As a recent trend of aesthetics worldwide, the aesthetics of everyday life rejects a narrow, art-centered methodology for aesthetics, and points to the continuities between aesthetic/artistic experience and everyday experience. Following this development, the subject matter of aesthetics and aesthetic engagements ceases to be merely about artworks or nature with a focus on a narrowly construed canonical set of aesthetic properties. The notion of aesthetic experience has also been expanded to accommodate a wider range of human experiences. Under the influences of the aesthetics of everyday life, aesthetic analysis has extended to all areas of living world, significantly broadening the range of studies in aesthetics. Given these

developments, it is not difficult to see that the aesthetics of everyday life is beginning to prosper in both western and eastern aesthetics.

The Rise of Aesthetics of Everyday Life: West and East

Since its inception, the aesthetics of everyday life has become a stream of thought with a global ambition. This interest has led to numerous systematic and in-depth works on this topic, some of which were conducted by the authors represented in this volume.¹ However, these developments still need to be sorted out and subjected to critical examination. This is one reason for the appearance of this anthology, focused on this new development of aesthetics, with essays by nine Western philosophers and another four from the East. In their discussion of the aesthetics of everyday life, these scholars offer concepts and theories necessary to the understanding of this approach to contemporary studies. The subtitle "West and East" signals an interest in the global scope of the views to be considered here. A salient feature of this book is that it not only represents the recent developments of the aesthetics of everyday life in the West, but also highlights the interaction between scholars in the West and the East on this topic.¹ Thus, the project is intended as a contribution toward mutual progress in the collaboration between Western and Eastern aesthetics. What distinguishes this book from other anthologies and monographs on this topic is that it attempts to reconstruct the aesthetics of everyday life through cultural dialogue between the West and the East, with a view to building a new form of aesthetics of everyday life, as seen from a global perspective.

In September 2012, an international conference on the "Aesthetics Towards Everyday Life: East and West" was held in China, the first ever international conference on the subject matter. During the conference, over eighty scholars from across the world discussed a range of topics including "the relation between aesthetics and everyday life," "the boundaries of art and life," "Eastern wisdom and everyday life aesthetics," "the relation of modern and contemporary arts to everyday life aesthetics," "environmental aesthetics and new media and everyday life aesthetics." The conference also provided opportunities for discussions on "urban life aesthetics" and the

"contributions of Chinese history to everyday life aesthetics." This book comprises a collection of the papers presented at the conference, with invited essays by four additional scholars whose work is important to the subject.

Unlike previous developments in aesthetics focused on the arts or on nature and contemporary environmental aesthetics, which mainly had their origins in the West followed by their introduction to aestheticians in the East, the aesthetics of everyday life appeared concurrently in both the West and the East. As a result, their common interest in this topic offers the basis for scholars in the West and East to proceed as equal partners in forging new territory for investigating the theoretical and practical dimensions of the aesthetics of everyday life.

Since Eastern aesthetics is traditionally concerned with the art of living, Eastern philosophers may prefer to use the term "living Aesthetics" or "Aesthetics of Living."² "Everyday life" tends to designate only an aspect of human existence, while "the Art of Living" acknowledges the presence of the aesthetic throughout human experiences. This amounts to saying that there is a deep-rooted tradition of living aesthetics in the East. Whether it is Chinese literati art or folk art, Japanese chado or gardening, or Korean porcelain or folk painting, all are part of the artistic expression of living aesthetics. For that matter, aesthetic traditions as such in many cultures have been passed on, without discontinuity, since ancient times, and today these traditions have undergone a creative transformation with heightened attention to living aesthetics in everyday life experiences.

More importantly, Chinese Confucian/Taoist aesthetics and Indian Zen aesthetics, among others, are essential sources of living aesthetics in East Asian cultures. The same can be said of aestheticians from the East, who believe that Chinese, Japanese and Korean traditional aesthetics offer a "prototype" of living aesthetics. For example, it is important to note that, living aesthetics, or the idea of artful life, constitutes the fundamental paradigm of Chinese classical aesthetics, whose primary sources are Confucian aesthetics and Taoist aesthetics, with Zen aesthetics as a later addition. However, building on these roots of Chinese classical aesthetics since Lao Zi (circa 604-

531 BC) and Confucius (551-497 BC), Chinese aesthetics has been on the path toward living aesthetics. Here, the point is that Chinese aesthetics is, at the outset, oriented towards everyday life, a most profound difference from European classical aesthetics.

Some Western scholars agree that the "art of living" centers on a "spiritual tradition" such as Zen, and in its construction has the human experience of the ordinary as its core.³ Hence, the idea of "artful life" also exists in Western aesthetics, to a lesser degree, traceable to the aesthetics of Nietzsche, and finds expression in Foucault's postmodern notion of "aestheticization of existence," even it is a Socratic reflection from Plato to Foucault.⁴ In his recently published *Life as Art: Aesthetics and the Creation of Self* (2012), Zachary Simpson defines "life as art" as follows:

[it] is the persistent attempt to actualize the aesthetic in and through one's living, seeing and thinking. This means integrating the essence of the work of art into how one shapes the contours and dimensions of one's being ... what emerges in the artful life, just like in all successful works of art, is an autonomous creation, which bears within it the traces of its production...⁵

Simpson's account of life as art carries aesthetics forward into everyday life aesthetics. However, his view assumes that aesthetics, as it functions in respect to art, remains the prototype for how aesthetics might relate to other aspects of everyday life.

Social Background: the Aestheticization of Everyday Life

Why is the aesthetics of everyday life becoming popular today? The answer lies in part with recent developments in global society.⁶ "The aesthetics of everyday life" has become a common concern for aestheticians across the world in that it represents a reaction to the profound worldwide changes in contemporary culture and art. In the context of globalization, there exists a two-way pan-aesthetic movement across the world, including a movement of "life as art" (drawing elements of everyday life into art) with an expansion of aesthetics into everyday life relatively. The corresponding element

consists of a movement of "art as life" (dissolving art within everyday life), in which art loses its "aura" in Walter Benjamin's meaning and is identified with everyday life. This latter development also includes the efforts of contemporary artists to escape the confinement of the aesthetic and create works on the borders of art and non-art.

However, it is also noteworthy that in terms of its interior structure the aestheticization of everyday life is complex. It occurs on at least two levels: one is on the surface, and the other at depth. While the former refers to the superficial aesthetic transformation of material living, the latter goes deeper 'nto the aesthetic experience of inner worlds. Respectively, these processes bring about exterior cultural change and alter individual features from consciousness to unconsciousness.

The expectation is that the aesthetics of everyday life will unseat two fundamental hypotheses of traditional aesthetics, namely: the concepts of "aesthetic disinterestedness" and the "autonomy of art," which represent core notions in classical aesthetics. Classical aesthetics in the European tradition had assumed that it was necessary to differentiate art and aesthetic experience from the everyday world of the senses. Hence, it was necessary to construct a theory of disinterested aesthetics to separate the aesthetic from ordinary life. With the possibility of a clear-cut dividing line between fine arts and popular arts, and the former being limited to only a few select members of society, art and aesthetic were essentially separated from everyday life. In the contemporary Western and Eastern aesthetics, new conceptions that bring the aesthetics of everyday life to the forefront have challenged the hegemony of traditional aesthetics. A focus on discovering the aesthetics of everyday life replaces aesthetic disinterest, and there is no longer an insistence on sharp distinctions between art and the other, as found in everyday experience. Thus, continuity replaces isolation in these domains. At times, aesthetics in its contemporary forms takes on the character of anti-aesthetics, as with the followers of Marcel Duchamp. At the same time, the distinctions between high and low taste that relied upon separating art from ordinary experience are now questioned.

Philosophical Sources: Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Dewey

Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein and John Dewey argue against the dichotomy between the subjective and the objective in western philosophy. In their discussions of aesthetics, these philosophers reflect an interest in its application to everyday life.

In his writings of the early 1920s, Heidegger advocated the idea of "*diefaktische Lebenserfahrung*" ("real living experience"). Later, this theme reappears in the concept of "*Dasein*" as in his *Being and Time*, published in 1927. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* contains the term "*Leben Form*," where art is seen as a "form of life." Again, Wittgenstein in his 1848 note refers to music as an expression of human life.⁷ John Dewey's aesthetics is also concerned with the connection between art and other life experiences. He aims 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."⁸ As Dewey uses the term experience in *Experience and Nature*, he allows for no sharp division of the subjective and the objective, or between action and substance, and as such there is no clear gap between art and everyday life in Dewey's aesthetics. Experience, in its consummation in everyday life, becomes art.

Although Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Dewey have influenced the twentieth-century development of aesthetics, including analytic, continental, and pragmatic aesthetics, not all of which would necessarily support our concern with the aesthetics of everyday life, these philosophers' contributions to this newer development remain substantial. For example, all three philosophers reject the subject-object dichotomy in philosophy, thus clearing the way for considering everyday activities of persons as art.

Of course, they differ in their understanding of how this might occur. Heidegger distinguishes between authenticity and non-authenticity in art in his calling for a return to everyday life, and while Dewey seeks to find art in the stream of experience, the followers of Wittgenstein prefer to understand art in terms of social institutions,

such as the art world. Apart from their differences, it seems that Heidegger's phenomenology, Wittgenstein's analytic philosophy and Dewey's pragmatism are in some respects sympathetic to everyday life aesthetics. Dewey's theory of consummate experience is especially useful for its relevance to everyday aesthetics, as his ideas are cited in recent research by aestheticians as offering a model for the idea of promoting "artful life."

Although Pragmatic aesthetics and the aesthetics of everyday life differ in some ways, they share certain common interests—pragmatic aesthetics advocates "Art as Experience," while the latter is concerned with "Experience as Art." The reversal of this phrase, though seemingly simple, underscores an important difference in direction. The idea of "Art as Experience" aims at restoring the continuity of art and everyday life, its focus being on how art is integrated into everyday experience. However, the idea of "Experience as Art" has its footing in experience, emphasizing that art is merely a part of human experience, and that human experience itself possesses "aesthetic" qualities. The latter points in the direction of building a new form of living aesthetics based on everyday life.

The Aesthetics of Everyday Life: Issues and Challenges

Three prevailing trends can be found in international aesthetics today: aesthetics as a philosophy of art, natural aesthetics (i.e. Anglo-American environmental aesthetics), and aesthetics of everyday life. These trends suggest that art, environment and everyday life represent the major concerns for aesthetic investigation today.

Based on the analysis offered in this introduction and the research in the essays of this volume, it seems clear that the aesthetics of everyday life holds a promising future in both Western and Eastern aesthetics. Given the rapidly growing interest and its potential for attracting new audiences extending beyond the more narrowly focused traditions of twentieth century analytic and environmental aesthetics, it stands to command its own share of attention in the future of aesthetic studies.

As a new trend in aesthetics appearing concurrently in the West and the East in the last ten years, the aesthetics of everyday life points to a growing diversification among existing methodologies for pursuing aesthetics, alongside the shift from art-based aesthetics. The cultural diversity manifest in global aesthetics offers common ground for the collaborative efforts of aesthetics in both the West and the East.

Already, there are signs of productive outcomes from the collaboration of Western and Eastern scholarly traditions on the subject of everyday aesthetics. One area where this collaboration is especially beneficial is in finding ways to connect aesthetics with a wider range of life experiences. Aesthetics in the West is generally based on the notion that aesthetics relates almost entirely to art, or to an idealized nature. Moving aesthetics beyond the limited sphere of life (the arts) that traditional Western aesthetics addresses remains a challenge. It seems that aesthetics in the East is already more closely engaged with the concrete rhythms of life than aesthetics in the West. Hence, Western aesthetics can benefit from this tradition as it seeks to develop effective approaches to bringing aesthetics into the concrete realms of everyday life. Whereas aesthetics in the West tends to focus on the extraordinary, Eastern aesthetics already understands that the aesthetic may populate both the extraordinary and the ordinary forms of experience.

At present, the aesthetics of everyday life as a newly emergent approach to aesthetics may encounter skepticism among aestheticians accustomed to the rigors of analytic philosophers who prefer to discuss aesthetics at the level of abstract concepts and argument, and who tolerate the particulars of experience mainly as illustrations.

For example, it may be argued that the concept of the "aesthetics of everyday life" itself is too broad for meaningful philosophical discourse. It is true of course that "everyday life" does not have clear-cut borders, but this can hardly be a significant objection given the seemingly endless debate over the concept of art itself that has taken place in aesthetics since the mid-twentieth century. The parameters of the other main target in Western, environmental aesthetics are also subject for debate in contemporary

circle of aesthetics. Even if "everyday life" further opens the reference field, this is not in itself a reason to dismiss the current efforts to pursue this investigation.

A related objection might be that everyday aesthetics renders problematic any efforts to identify or differentiate particular aesthetic qualities. Against this form of objection one need only recall the endless arguments Posed as to whether it is possible to identify a discrete category of aesthetic qualities. If there were agreement on a particular set of aesthetic properties, there would be no reason to assume that their application is limited to works of art or nature. Indeed many of the aesthetic properties identified in Western philosophy, such as beautiful, pleasurable, harmonious, attractive, elegant and graceful, all seem applicable as aesthetic properties to a wide range of everyday life experiences and objects.

Hence, there is no reason to abandon the pursuit of the aesthetics of everyday life in the face of such objections. On the contrary, there are many benefits to gain in bringing aesthetics to bear on a wider sphere of human life, made possible through efforts to show the relevance of aesthetics to a broader range of human actions.

Dialogue and Consensus: between East and West

The essays in this book approach these questions from a variety of perspectives in Western and Eastern aesthetics.

Arnold Berleant discusses the dramatic broadening of the scope of aesthetic inquiry today as extending beyond the arts and natural beauty to include environmental aesthetics in recent decades, not only of the natural but also of the social. Along with environmental ethics, aesthetics has become part of the broader scope of environmental studies and the environment includes the social as well as the natural. Aesthetics has been applied to social relations and political uses, and now most recently to the objects and situations of everyday life. Berleant views the dramatic shift from classical aesthetics as formulated by Baumgarten's *Aesthetics* in 1750 as offering greater inclusiveness and also a fundamental alteration in aesthetic inquiry.

This changes the nature of scholarly inquiry in aesthetics from an inquiry into aesthetics of objects to aesthetics of experience and sensibility.

Liu Yuedi traces the shift in contemporary aesthetics from its recent grounding in post-analytic philosophy, with an emphasis on examining aesthetics in the context of an art world, to a renewed interest in exploring everyday life aesthetics as seen from a Chinese perspective (he called it Living Aesthetics). In their embracing of the aesthetics of everyday life including environmental aesthetics, contemporary scholars find new interest in the impact of globalization and the "natural aesthetics" of particular environments, such as the search for a new understanding of being Chinese in the contemporary arts and culture as seen by Chinese and global aesthetics.

Thomas Leddy argues that understanding the relation of ethics to aesthetics is a necessary component for a theory of everyday aesthetics. With references to Aristotle's theory of happiness and Confucius's understanding of the conditions necessary to a well-forned life, Leddy offers the thesis that "everyday aesthetics is important because our lives have a fundamental aesthetic dimension in so far as they are happy or not, and this dimension is one on which aesthetics overlaps with ethics."

His analysis divides contemporary theories of everyday aesthetics into two categories. The first (right) includes those (Allen Arvid Carlson, Parsons, Downey and others) who argue that aesthetics in everyday life should be treated similarly to how aesthetics is considered in reference to art. The (left) theorists (Leddy, Uriko Saito, Richard Shusterman, Arto Haapala and others) break down important distinctions between aesthetics in art and everyday life. Happiness in Leddy's theory extends to virtually all aspects of life including nature, bodily and social experiences, as well as the activities of the mind.

Allen Arvid Carlson finds a dilemma of everyday aesthetics originating in "an inherent tension between the traditional Western notion of aesthetic experience and the typical experience of everyday life." This tension opposes the traditional aesthetic experience as "abstracted and disinterested" against the "engaging and active"

features of mundane ordinary experience. Carlson examines six strategies aimed at easing the tension between the aesthetic and the everyday, only one of which he finds plausible (a cognitive approach focusing on the "interesting details, complex workings, and subtle functionings" of everyday life).

Heinz Paetzold examines the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in the formation of human individuality and sociability by juxtaposing Michel Foucault's aesthetics of existence and Charles Taylor's ethics of authenticity. Paetzold argues that aesthetics, which focuses on the individual, helps to prevent them from being subordinated to the universal. Aesthetics discloses new perspectives on the world and stimulates us to experience the world in new ways. The experience provided by aesthetics thus draws attention to aspects of life ignored in everyday life.

According to Paetzold's understanding, Foucault posits an aesthetics of existence as a solution to the shortcomings of modern society. This new understanding of the contemporary world calls for an updated societal model replacing the Greek polis, and based on Foucault's contemporary aesthetics of existence. Foucault identifies the key elements of attention to the details of the world around us, viewing the world from different perspectives, and the acknowledgment of aesthetics as a form of knowledge. Individuals should thus dedicate their lives to the art of living, which entails connecting aesthetic existence and the 'ethics of authenticity while overcoming the separation of art and everyday living.

Curtis L. Carter examines the aesthetics of everyday actions and objects as experienced through various stages in the evolution of art photography with examples from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present including "pure photography," staged, altered, and appropriated photographs. With philosophical references grounded in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes, the essay traces changes in the understanding of everyday life aesthetics as seen from the eye of the camera. With the aid of the camera, photographers, from Edward Weston and Man Ray at the beginning of the twentieth century to Ed Ruscha and Jeff Walls at present, continue to show new possibilities for understanding aesthetics in human

experience. Photography thus offers a window into the connections between aesthetics and everyday life.

Susan Feagin approaches the aesthetics of everyday life from the perspective of theatre arts where ordinary actions may constitute portions of a theatrical performance as well as appreciation of a theatre performance. Using Allan Kaprow's "happenings" and Antonin Artaud's theory of audience participation as examples, Feagin demonstrates how the actions of everyday life become the materials of theatre art. Emotional responses common in everyday life thus constitute both the materials of theatre and represent an important element in audience engagement.

Adile Jale Erzen finds the street objects of Istanbul as similar to those of avant-garde or *arte povera*, which she labels "found avant-garde." Such objects from different areas of Turkey were not meant as art but nevertheless were produced with a sense of aesthetics that generates experiences close to the experiences afforded by the avant-garde art object. Her strategy in the search for aesthetics in everyday life is to transform street objects into art, or objects that generate aesthetic interest comparable to the experiences afforded by other recognized forms of art.

Stephen John Davies examines the origins of human adornment and ornamentation, such as jewelry, in reference to the aesthetics of everyday life. His analysis suggests that personal adornments are neither trivial nor meaningless with respect to their social functions. Davies explores the connections between the aesthetic character of such adornments and their functional purposes.

Mary Bittner Goldstein explores the transitions from Kantian aesthetics, in which the emphasis is on the aesthetic experiences of nature and art, and analytic aesthetics to the study of the aesthetic qualities found in everyday life. How, for example, does the aesthetic experience attained from attending to the formal and expressive qualities of a work of fine art differ from the appreciation of the decoration of a living room or the agreeable aroma of freshly brewed coffee?

Yuriko Saito offers an account of everyday aesthetics with reference to traditional Japanese texts, in which the aesthetic, in both its positive and negative states, is found to be pervasive throughout all aspects of the "everyday, including the quality of sounds, bodily movements and ritual ceremonies such as the tea ceremony, domestic chores, food, the work environment, responses to changes in seasons, and personal and social interactions. Awareness of the aesthetic in Japanese culture is grounded in a heightened sensibility, and Saito's essay contrasts the importance of the negative aesthetics found in Japanese aesthetics with its relative absence in Western aesthetics. Negative aesthetics is considered important because "it participates in shaping our worlds as well as in forming individual experiences.

Pan Fan sets forth the everyday life of the traditional literati extending from the scholar 's study to outdoor poetry gatherings. This view of the aesthetics in the everyday life of the Chinese traditional scholar is set in contrast to the aesthetic features of everyday life in contemporary China. The solution of transforming aesthetics in the direction of everyday aesthetics is to return to the broad perspective found in traditional Chinese classical aesthetics.

Wang Que's methodology for aesthetics embraces both art and all levels of everyday life, including the lives of every social class. His view dispenses with aesthetics as an independent system of modern knowledge or a certain aesthetic theory, replacing them with aesthetic explorations concerning the quality of worldly life. Body, desire, consumption and pleasure replace transcendental concerns in his view of everyday aesthetics.

Notes

¹Andrew Light & Jonathan M. Smith eds., *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Columbia University Press, 2005); Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Katya Mandolin, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaic. The Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Ashgate, 2007); Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Broadview Press, 2012).

²Liu Yuedi. *Living Aesthetics: Critique Of Modernity and Re-construction of Aesthetic Spirit* (Hefei: Anhui Education Press, 2005); Liu Yuedi. *Living*

Aesthetics and Art Experience: Aesthetic as Life, Art as Experience (Nanjing: Nanjing Publishing House, 2007).

³Crispin Sartwell, *The Art of Living: Aesthetics of the Ordinary in World Spiritual Tradition* (State University of New York, 1995), 1.

⁴Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1998.

⁵Zachary Simpson, *Life as Art: Aesthetics and the Creation of Self* (New York: Lexington Books / Roman and Littlefield, 2012), 284. See also Bruce Fleming, *The Aesthetic Sense of Life: A Philosophy of the Everyday* (University Press of America, 2007).

⁶Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage Publications, 1991), 65- 72.

⁷Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. Anthony Kenny (London: Blackwell, 1984), 80.

⁸John Dewey. *Art as Experience* (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 1934), 3.