

# Aesthetic Investigations

Published on behalf of the Dutch Association of Aesthetics

*Special Issue – Arts, Ontology, and Politics*



---

## Review of *Everydayness. Contemporary Aesthetic Approaches*

Edited by Adrián Kvokačka, Lisa Giombini,  
Roma TrE-Press, 2021

*Author*

THOMAS FROY

*Affiliation*

BELGIUM

---

The everyday, claim editors Lisa Giombini and Adrián Kvokačka, is ‘per se, an incredibly slippery notion. It is at the same time the most obvious and elusive of ideas’ [9]. At once what is most familiar to us, and yet – or perhaps, therefore – what is most difficult to pin down: thus, Giombini and Kvokačka, claim ‘while art, from Hesiod . . . through Flemish painting, the modern novel, and twentieth century avant-gardes, has always been fascinated by the most mundane dimensions of life, philosophers, on their side, have always been inclined to ignore everydayness for centuries’ [10]. Beyond definitional difficulties, however, there may be somewhat more essential – perhaps political – reasons for this neglect: if, as the editors argue, ‘philosophy was considered a product of the *polis*’ and with a domain entirely consisting of men (9), the domain of the everyday, ‘where the satisfaction of our most intimate bodily needs take place – eating, cooking, feeding, dressing, cleaning, householding, washing up, sleeping, resting, taking care, nursing, loving’ [10] might be considered the domain of the ‘feminine’. In addition, then, to the conceptual lacunae left by centuries of philosophical inattention, the editors also pose political motivations for a reappraisal of the aesthetics of the everyday.

That such a reappraisal should take place now is not entirely incidental, however; although the editors do not speculate as to what has brought about such changes, they claim that we live in ‘the rapidly transforming fabric of contemporary life’, and such an existence has meant that ‘everyday habits and

routines appear more as a means for preserving personal autonomy, memory and identity ... against the wide-spreading sense of homelessness and placelessness' [11] of the contemporary period.

Indeed, among the contributors, there is little consensus as to 'what "everyday" and "aesthetics" in "everyday aesthetics" mean and how they are related to each other' [16]. Swantje Martach raises a worry regarding the very nature of aestheticisation itself, concerning the process of identifying certain phenomena of the everyday as aesthetic objects, which deports them to a different domain – namely, the domain of traditional aesthetics, the beautiful: Martach argues that:

By the very act of researching the beauty of the daily humdrum, the very action of pointing with the own researching finger onto it, the very statement 'there is beauty, too', the focused-on beauty is extracted from the humdrum, and thus ceases to be a beauty of a humdrum, a humdrum beauty, but rather becomes a beauty of an experience. It becomes an event. It is extracted from the surroundings that define it and put into a new, 'non-natural', artificial surrounding comparable to a lab or a museum, whereby it crucially, and for everyday aesthetics' purposes detrimentally shifts from a beauty of the ordinary to a beauty of the special, and hence is realigned to the manifestation of beauty of which everyday aesthetics precisely seeks to discern it: artistic beauty.[258]

The risk of transformation under the gaze of analysis is, on the other hand, a risk faced by all analysis: indeed, a number of authors in this collection take these transformations in our experiences of the everyday precisely to be the focus of an aesthetics of the everyday. Michaela Paštéková considers the processes by which the Covid-19 pandemic enhanced our understanding of the everyday rituals and processes by which we live. Similarly, Elisabetta Di Stefano argues that our everyday aesthetic experiences combine and modulate between elements of the extraordinary and the ordinary in such a way that allows them to be repeated, reexamined and reworked continually.

In fact, the importance of change is considered by the editors to be central to the contemporary field of everyday aesthetics; this is borne out by many of the contributing theorists: almost every text contains reference to or examines changing experiences of the everyday. Beside the notion that, in times of rapid change, a turn to the everyday is natural, Giombini and Kvokačka further problematise the notion of the everyday, asking 'whose everyday' we are discussing: they claim that 'everyday life changes from person to person, place to place, culture to culture. None has exactly the same everyday as someone else or could live her life in exactly the same way' [12]

Although such an observation might be understood as an invitation, even a demand, to begin investigations with a critical eye toward the possibilities of Eurocentrism in the Western aesthetic tradition, or at least a retention of

critical distance with regard to the question of whether we all share the same everyday, the editors immediately counterclaim that:

everybody, beyond age, personal history, class, and ethnicity, eats, dresses, dwells someplace, sleeps, and washes on a daily basis. Everybody uses a series of objects in their daily life: furniture, different kinds of tools, clothes, machines, and dwells in some places: the home, the workplace, the streets, the neighbourhood, and the city. We are all similarly anchored in the mundane.[12-13]

This claim is not substantiated in the ‘Introduction’, nor reexamined by subsequent authors: in this way, the book lacks an explicit examination of the possibility that there are those of us who do not all eat, dress, dwell, sleep and wash somewhere everyday, and, thus, further misses the opportunity for a more complex and specific analysis of the ‘what’ and the ‘who’ of everyday aesthetic experiences.

Additionally, the notion of ‘change’ appears toward the end of the ‘Introduction’, in which the editors indicate intentions stretching beyond the theoretical, based on the

shared assumption that emphasizing the aesthetic qualities of everyday life may not only be of theoretical and philosophical relevance but is also endowed with moral and practical implications.[19]

Giombini and Kvokačka thus align themselves with the tradition of *ästhetische Bildung*, considering aesthetics ‘a moral tool for developing people into more deliberate, aware members of society and community’. [19] Possibilities for moral improvement reappear, somewhat sparsely, in the contributions of Lukáš Makky, Di Stefano and Polona Tratnik.

The absence of a ‘Conclusion’ reminds the reader of the collection’s compilatory nature: the editors by no means indicate that this is an exhaustive study of the everyday; on the contrary, the centrality of the notion of change certainly suggests that further investigations ought to and will follow.

tfroy.e@zoho.com

---

COPYRIGHT:

© 2022 Thomas Froy

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

*Aesthetic Investigations* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Dutch Association of Aesthetics.