

## Presentation

Adam Andrzejewski

Uniwersytet Warszawski  
a.andrzejewski@uw.edu.pl



There are many objects in the world that exemplify aesthetic properties. Which of us has not been delighted at least once with the view of majestic mountains, the endless sea or the tranquillity of a dirt road? Works of art cause us to experience the same kind of experience. Of course, everyone has slightly different preferences as to which art forms provide him or her with the greatest aesthetic satisfaction. However, once we get to know the form (or forms) of art that affects us, we experience it aesthetically. We contemplate a painting, discuss a favourite story or lose ourselves in the perception of a musical piece. It is a truism to say that nature and art require slightly different models of aesthetic experience, e.g. nature is generally experienced by us as something that arose and exists without human interference (another thing is that it is extremely difficult to find such “nature” now), while art is problematized almost always as something that has been intentionally made by people in order to be experienced, understood and assessed by other people.

However, aesthetics is often perceived as something detached from the world we live in. Although beauty and sublime make the world a more desired place, philosophical aesthetics is perceived as a discipline designed to study art for its own sake. That is, many claim that aesthetic properties of objects and artworks are disconnected from their other properties and values such as moral, political and social ones. In that respect, the common view on aesthetics is still fuelled by the Kantian tradition according to which an aesthetic experience of objects must be achieved through contemplation and is marked by its disinterestedness.

The claim that there are only two great classes of aesthetic objects in the world, i.e. nature and art, is extremely harmful as it discriminates against many essential objects and experiences that we encounter in our lives. A relatively large group of people deal with works of mass art, such as posters, TV videos or comics. Many more people have the opportunity to associate with the so-called high art, while only a few happen to enjoy the unspoiled natural landscape. Nevertheless, one gets the impression that the world is full of aesthetic phenomena. We notice them and follow them when we dress, go to work, shop, clean the kitchen or prepare a meal. What’s more, we are also surrounded by numerous negative aesthetic phenomena, such as the disorder in our children’s bedrooms, a basket for dirty clothes in the bathroom or the neglected streets and buildings that accompany us on the way to the univer-

sity. All these phenomena, which stimulate strong aesthetic reactions, are neither part of the natural world nor the world of art. Instead, they are part of our everyday life.

The traditional picture has constantly been undermined by the arts and everyday practices. Emergence of new artforms clearly shows the inner dynamic within the artworld. Already established rules and patterns are always temporal in nature and subject to change. Moreover, it seems that aesthetics nowadays is open for fruitful collaboration not only with other academic disciplines but – and more importantly – with matters that *matter* in the outer world. Sustainable growth, urban and cityspace planning, political and social sphere, natural environment or education are only a few areas where aesthetics is much desired. A rapid development in the everyday studies mirrors a long-lasting interest in mundane, ordinary and ongoing aspects of human existence. Aesthetics is no longer a nice addition to our life: it becomes the centre of it. Personal tastes, cultivated manners, artistic styles and aesthetic choices are not only very important for human agents but are also ways of manifesting ourselves. Coherent aesthetic choices need to be connected with aesthetic forecasting and planning and through them we shape our identities as well as the environment around us. The indisputable power of aesthetics has been shown recently in social activism where aesthetics is one of the most important tools in fighting for social justice.

This thematic issue of ENRAHONAR is devoted to the meditation on different ways in which philosophical aesthetics is precious for various forms of human activity.

In his paper “El argot estético: los modos de decir como constitutivos de la experiencia estética”, Fernando Infante del Rosal claims the importance of language in the configuration of the aesthetic experience, arguing that, before performing its expressive and communicative function, language operates as a constituent element of the aesthetic experience itself. In particular, this happens in everyday and popular ways of speaking, especially in the form of slang. The author focuses on the current expressions of juvenile jargon that function as constituents of new aesthetic experiences. One of the theses defended by Infante del Rosal, inspired here by Wittgenstein, is that what expressions such as ‘on fleek’, ‘ratchet’, ‘cringe’ or ‘shooketh’ say cannot be said without them, that the forms of the new aesthetic slang of youth are not mere translations or devaluations of expressions associated with supposedly genuine experiences. In this sense, aesthetic slang “makes world”, modifies and broadens the framework of our aesthetic experience.

Berta Galofré Claret’s “The ethics of poetic expression in Emmanuel Lévinas and Maurice Blanchot” talks about two different ways to deal with the Unknown through the aesthetic experience. On one hand, there is the Emmanuel Lévinas’ perspective, on the other the Blanchot’s. Nevertheless, as the author of the paper affirms: “Lévinas’ aesthetics cannot be understood without Blanchot, nor Blanchot’s without Lévinas”. Thus, the paper compares both views paying attention to the consequences of the required loss of the “I” at

time to create. Experience that arises from an impersonal subject related to the levinasian *il y a*, which is an absolute demand that corresponds to the artistic inspiration. For Lévinas, this phenomenon would represent the worst kind of irresponsibility and a type of art idolatry, whereas for Blanchot it would be just an aesthetic fact, precondition *sine qua non* for the art creation. On this matter, the author wonders about the existence of ethical art, as well as thinking about how the artwork could give access to the ethical. Since Lévinas understood ethics as a self-control *praxis*, art as the supreme value of morality is not possible, because poetic activity (dis)possessed the subject/artist in such a way that the creator is not able to control his writing. That is why Lévinas concluded that we could have ethics, but not poetics, so, we cannot fit the philosophical logic into art, which is irrational and chaotic. Meanwhile, Blanchot claimed the inseparability of ethics and the experience of writing: the fascination suffered by the artist will connect the creator to a transcendental posture that will transform the horror of this uncontrollable art exigency into poetics, the most moral and civilized answer.

In his article “El concepto de figura en el pensamiento de Jean-François Lyotard: arte, política y ontología”, Sergio Meijide Casas proposes an approach to the central concept that appears in Lyotard’s first texts on Aesthetics and Philosophy of the Arts: the figure. To do so, he undertakes a three-part work: first, he maps Lyotard’s main influences in the late sixties and early seventies; second, he analyses some of the ideas and concepts that appear in his texts from that period, such as Discours, figure; and finally, he concludes that Lyotard’s aesthetic reflection not only involves artistic, aesthetical or political thoughts, but also ontological ones. According to Meijide Casas himself, this text aims to vindicate Lyotardian thought in a context in which it has hardly been worked on, as is the case in the Spanish-speaking world, where the consequences of some concepts of great interest – such as the figure-matrix or the idea that “the dream-work does not think” – have never been seriously considered. In addition to this, the text proposes a punctual approach to works by the photographer Joan Fontcuberta and the filmmaker Peter Tscherkassky, as well as a brief comparison between the Lyotardian interpretation of the myth of Orpheus and that of other thinkers such as Charles Mauron and Maurice Blanchot.

Carlos Vara Sánchez’s contribution “What do aesthetic affordances afford?” continues the recent trend that explores connections between embodied and extended approaches to cognition such as ecological psychology and enactivism and classical philosophical aesthetics. In this case, Vara Sánchez examines the viability, risks, and potential advantages of applying the concept of affordance to discuss the dynamics and alleged qualitative particularities of aesthetic experiences. To this end, he presents some influential characterizations of the notion of aesthetic affordance offered in recent years by Maria Brincker and Shaun Gallagher and compares them with the more established one of affective affordance developed by Joel Krueger and Giovanna Colombetti. Vara Sánchez argues that we should think of aesthetic affordances as a particular

type of affective affordance that allows carrying out a narrative rewriting of ourselves with potential unexpected consequences on our social context.

The contribution “Space-making and aesthetics: Adaptive restoration, new functions and their experience in architecture” by Zoltán Somhegyi surveys the aesthetic and – connected to them – also some of the practical implications of adaptive restorations. Although this practice is not entirely new, and we can trace many earlier examples from the history of architecture, i.e. that either still functional or no longer used buildings get re-purposed, the phenomenon is still truly worth examining further. An important factor in such further examinations should be a special focus on the role that aesthetics plays in adaptive restoration, as well as on the issues of experience. How, for example, the “new” building is related to the “old” one? How do the changes in function possibly modify the aesthetic qualities of the building, as well our experience of the space? What novel insights can we gain about architecture in general and about the modes of safeguarding and care of our built heritage in particular through the investigation of the aesthetic aspects of such projects? Zoltán Somhegyi scrutinises these questions, through both theoretical considerations and actual examples coming from different countries.

Alfonso Hoyos Morales’ paper entitled “La estética de lo cotidiano y la construcción del mundo propio: desde Levinas y Merleau-Ponty” has two objectives. On the one hand, through Lévinas and Merleau-Ponty, it aims to show the relevance of phenomenological tools in the current debate on the aesthetics of everyday life. On the other hand, it defends the thesis that what is specific to the aesthetics of everyday life consists in understanding that our daily life is inherently founded on aesthetic elements that are integrated into our lives in an unthinking way. In turn, these aesthetic elements, despite their thoughtlessness, make up an essential element in the construction of our subjectivity and our own world. Through Lévinas the paper uses his concept of enjoyment to found an ethical justification of everyday life; through Merleau-Ponty it turns to his reflections on corporality to describe the phenomenology of this experience. The characteristic closeness, inattention and lack of analytical differentiation of the aesthetics of the everyday will constitute, in turn, one of the main differences with other aesthetic theories characterized by contemplation and disinterest.

In “The world worth making: Implementing care aesthetics to boost well-being” Sue Spaid begins from stating that in treating care as a moral imperative, the ethics of care aims for normativity, yet its normativity is thrown into jeopardy by the fact that standards of care vary dramatically among care-givers. To counter the limitations of care ethics, Spaid proposes care aesthetics, whose success reflects *measurable* metrics. Rooted in ameliorative practices, care aesthetics stresses the *well-being* of the cared-for, whereby flourishing entails both capacity and access. Thus, care aesthetics and care ethics are distinct, since the former treats the well-being of the cared-for as proof of the “sign that our caring has been received”. To demonstrate the measurable features of well-being, she offers two concrete examples: one pro-

posed by the landscape architect Joan Iversson Nassauer and another focused on curatorial practice (*curare* is Latin for care). To explain why philosophers have overlooked the role of well-being in signalling the success of care, Spaid describes how concepts such as balance, harmony, order and unity, which were originally characterised as material, became *immaterial* aesthetic concepts by the 20th Century. At the end, she circles back to connect well-being to epistemology and ethics, before discussing how the goal to enhance the well-being of cared-fors and care-givers alike stands to enrich quotidian experiences.

The article “La vida infame en el régimen estético de la historia: Rancière lector de Foucault” by Rafael Farías Becerra proposes a different view of the uses of literature in Michel Foucault, showing us how in the 1970s that minor literature or “sub-literature” (speeches of the gallows, *lettres de cachet*, chronicles of crime, autobiographies, etc.) are oriented towards a new reading of power that puts the literary institution itself in crisis. It will be decisive that in *The Lives of Infamous Men* (1977), a project in which Foucault proposed to set aside the literary in order to anthologise existences of which only a few records or traces of writing are preserved, it is pointed out that literature is born in a long journey from the 17th to the 18th century with the great ethical and political imperative of bringing to light the darkest and most banal aspects of societies, forming part of the great network of legal, penal, psychological discourses, etc. that inaugurate modernity. However, this can only happen once the narrative of the great feats of the Fine Arts has been abandoned in favour of the political scandal of fiction. This is what will become more visible in the light of the Aesthetic Regime of the Arts proposed by Jacques Rancière, for whom the construction of a new hermeneutics as a journey into the social depths, before any modern science, has first been realised by the new aesthetic paradigm of literature. Now, for Foucault, recovering the black legend of those infamous existences meant working with the banal, the random and discontinuous of history, a lesson that also seems to have been taken up by Jacques Rancière. However, for the latter philosopher, it was not a conflict of power that allowed those dark existences to come to light, but rather it was the reading or encounter with literature, as a new emancipatory sensibility, what made those muted and forgotten lives of history able to forever change their destiny.