



**MONGREL
MATTER**



aesthetic literacy vol. II: out of mind

ISBN: 978-0-6486054-1-6

second PDF edition

first published january 2023

this edition november 2023

cover art: Eugene the Blissful

mongrel matter logo: Ali Ben Nekhy

special thanks to Chloe Ray

all material copyright of the respective authors

Contents

II. 1 Socrates, Inc. (Part 2) by Lycinus Secundus	1
II. 2 Aesthetics is Everywhere by Yuriko Saito	17
II. 3 A Defence of the Tag by Philip Ivanov	23
II. 4 Aesthetic Practices by Pauline von Bonsdorff	30
II. 5 A Trip to the Zoo (cont.) by Michel-Antoine Xhignesse	38
II. 6 Sonnet for Sport Aesthetics by Jason Holt	42
II. 7 The Aesthetics of Coffee by Elisabetta Di Stefano	43
II. 8 Umbrella Philosophy by Lilli Förster	47
II. 9 Synapsing Hegel's Philosophy of Art through the Brainbody by Rowan Bailey	52
II. 10 Shimmer: The Aesthetics of Aboriginal Art and Animals by Darren Jorgensen	59
II. 11 Gypsy Aesthetics by Daniel Baker	63

II. 12 It's Fiesta Season! (In the Philippines) by Christine Carmela R. Ramos	68
II. 13 Aesthetic, Jamaican Popular Music, and the City by Lisa Tomlinson	74
II. 14 Puzzling Out the Popped out Puzzle of Pop by Juraj Malíček and Martin Boszorád	87
II. 15 The Aesthetics of Pop-Rock Music by Stefano Marino	91
II. 16 Punk by Jesse Prinz	102
II. 17 Musical Experiments in an Ethics of Listening by Iain Campbell	116
II. 18 The Discourse of Jazz: An Unstable Dialectic by Robert Kraut	121
II. 19 What's the Deal with Standup Comedy and Philosophy? by Alan Daboin	128
II. 20 Bob Dylan and R. G. Collingwood: Remarks on Suspicions of Authorship by David Goldblatt	141
II. 21 Aesthetics, Ontology, and a Museum Acquisition by Ivan Gaskell	153
II. 22 Banksy at Sotheby's: Art as Commerce and Performance by Alison Young	167
II. 23 A Few of Them Have Perception by INO	171

II. 24 The Contradictory Aesthetics of Sexual Literacy by Paul Reynolds	174
II. 25 Falling in Love by John M. Carvalho	181
II. 26 Philosophy and Dance: Can We Really Think Without a Body? by Paola Crespi	186
II. 27 Dance, Answerability and Understanding by Graham McFee	188
II. 28 Dancing to Art by Keith Lehrer	196
II. 29 Aesthetic Experience as Becoming: Two Perspectives by Nicholas Davey and Linda Bojšakova	205
II. 30 Implicit Aesthetics by Randall Auxier	215
II. 31 Explorations in the OPEN by Sarah Cheang and Shehnaz Suterwalla	230
II. 32 What a Desirable Aesthetic Education Looks Like by Stephen Davies	237
II. 33 Art and Evolution by Richard D. Hickman	243
II. 34 The Aesthetics of Green Art and Green Skills by Yrjö Sepänmaa	250
II. 35 Ecological Aesthetics by Cheng Xiangzhan	256

II. 36 Aesthetics and the Environmental Crisis by Emily Brady	262
II. 37 Create Dangerously by Albert Camus	269
II. 38 Aesthetic and Domestic Skins: In Lock-down with Samuel Beckett by Trish McTighe	283
II. 39 Movies as Environments by Matthew Crippen and Farida Youseff	287
II. 40 (From) Memoirs by Robert-Houdin	293
II. 41 Imagination's Potential by Lior Levy	303
II. 42 Intention in Photography by Ryan Wittingslow	309
II. 43 Thinking Through Pictures by Edward Winters	311
II. 44 Art, Architecture and Racism by Tom Spector	319
II. 45 The Aesthetics of Poverty and the Logic of Racial Capitalism by Julia McClure	327
Changes by 빅토르 최 & Makaveli	333
Appendix	334
Biographies	345

II. 7

The Aesthetics of Coffee

Elisabetta Di Stefano

*I have measured out my life with coffee spoons*¹⁸.

- T.S. Eliot

*Cheers to you who ardently desire beauty: drink coffee!*¹⁹

- F.J. Hofer

Does it make sense to talk about the aesthetics of coffee? What does this philosophical discipline, traditionally devoted to the study of art and beauty, have to do with a typical drink of everyday life?

To prepare a coffee and to experience the drinking of it is a rightful topic to clarify some contemporary philosophical trends in Aesthetics: today Aesthetics has widened its focus from art, as traditionally approached in museums, to the experience of everyday life²⁰.

Every morning when we wake up, we perform several “aesthetic” practices. However, the most distinctive daily action in most cultures is drinking coffee. In the morning the sound of brewing coffee, with its aroma filling the air, is one of the most comforting moments of the day. Making a good cup of coffee can be interpreted as an art in the ancient meaning of the word – that is to say “expertise”. It entails the knowledge of different blends and techniques as well as the care of preparing it.

Nowadays making a coffee decorated with foam has reached the fame of art – “Latte Art”. According to the modern meaning of art, it is a product endowed with aesthetic qualities, such as originality and beauty, and even festivals and exhibitions have been organised to celebrate the best performance in this field. Latte art requires creativity and, like fine arts, arouses emotion and gives pleasure. In our daily routine, foam drawings make us smile and begin the day well.

¹⁸T.S. Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917) in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, vol. I, London: Faber & Faber 2015, p. 6.

¹⁹ F.J. Hofer, *Abhandlung vom Kaffee*. Frankfurt-Leipzig: Stettin 1781, p. 78 (my transl.)

²⁰ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934). London: Penguin 2005.

Combining art and food is common in cultural traditions, for example the “marzipan architecture” of the seventeenth century chef Marie-Antoine Carême, and today’s cake design creations. However, we must not forget the artistic performances with food, as for instance by Rirkrit Tiravanija. It is therefore not surprising that Latte Art has reached artistic acknowledgement. But what happens if we shift the focus from the artists to the audience? Can drinking coffee be recognised as an aesthetic experience?

Drinking coffee consciously is a complex experience. Our senses are triggered when the aroma reaches our nostrils, anticipating the pleasure of taste before we set eyes on the coffee itself. Subsequently a choice has to be made concerning the type of coffee or the type of container desired. According to one’s taste or to the circumstances, it is a question of “judgement”: “ristretto”, “corretto”, “macchiato”, “decaffeinato”, in a small cup, a big cup, a mug, a glass, or take away cup?

Coffee is often consumed in a hurry, while engrossed in one’s daily tasks. To appreciate the aesthetic value of coffee, we should drink it with total body consciousness, in line with the philosophical perspective first outlined by Alexander G. Baumgarten, who presented Aesthetics as a theory of a “sense-based knowledge”²¹. We should reflect on our hand on the cup and the cup against our lips. Doing so, we could feel the difference between texture and shape – how different it is to touch plastic, glass, or porcelain, not to mention the difference between a mug with a thick rim or a thin one, a narrow or a wide one.

Finally, we should capture the taste in our mouth and feel the liquid run down our throat. While lingering on these small pleasures and paying attention to them – as we do with works of art – we transform a seemingly trivial experience into an aesthetic one. What about adding a croissant or a slice of home-made cake? “Home-made” is a magic word. It evokes the atmosphere associated with old style values, such as “family”, “tradition” and “genuine food”. Being aware of emotional and sensory aspects and paying attention to detail allows us to live aesthetically and make everyday life special.

For many people, drinking coffee is a sacred moment, that is, a ritual celebrated to mark the rhythm of the day. It is often the first thing we think of when opening

²¹ A.G. Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry* (1735). Trans. by K. Aschenbrenner and W.B. Holther. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954.

our eyes in the morning and is deemed essential to gather energy for our daily routine. On a busy day a quick cup of coffee is often simply a short break to be shared with colleagues. But with our family or friends it can complete a warm gathering together. Coffee is a social ritual which encourages company and solidarity, as in the Neapolitan custom of leaving a “suspended coffee” (“*caffè sospeso*”): this custom refers to the nineteenth century habit of affluent people paying not only for their own coffee, but also for another, which somebody less well-off could enjoy later.

The coffee ritual is a classic case for understanding everyday aesthetics, which focuses on repetition²². Similarly, Yuriko Saito describes the Japanese tea ceremony as a fitting example of everyday aesthetic practice²³. The tea ceremony is both a moment of meditation and a form of art, inasmuch as every small action is rife with meaning. Tea ceremonies are held in a special room, separate from the rest of the house, and every action within is performed slowly and in complete silence. While the tea ceremony is rarely performed nowadays due to its complex preparation, and is therefore no longer typical of everyday life, drinking coffee is for many people seen as a daily pleasure that we cannot do without. This is why the routine practice of drinking coffee can qualify as one of the best examples of Everyday Aesthetics, provided it is experienced with care and bodily attention.²⁴

The benefits of coffee are not only limited to the pleasure of smell and taste, but can be discovered in people’s physical and intellectual wellbeing. As the French doctor Cabanis once said,

“the pleasure of drinking coffee is nothing compared to the well-being felt afterwards. [...] The stimulating action of this drink acts equally on both sensory and motor strengths, and rather than disturbing their natural balance, it completes it and perfects it. Sensations are simultaneously more vivid and defined, ideas more active and sharpened”²⁵.

From a somaesthetic perspective, namely, the realm which links philosophy and physical experience, the coffee experience may be deemed aesthetic due to its relaxing effect, as well as the way in which it rejuvenates the body and stimulates

²² K. Melchionne, *The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics*, in “Contemporary Aesthetics”, n. 11, 2013 <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=66>.

²³ Y. Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

²⁴ S. Irvin, *Scratching an Itch*, in “Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, vol. 66, 2008, pp. 25-35; E. Di Stefano, *Che cos’è l’estetica quotidiana [What is everyday aesthetics]*. Roma: Carocci 2017.

²⁵ P.G.E. Cabanis, *Oeuvres complètes de Cabanis: Rapports du physique et du moral de l’homme*, vol. 4, Paris, 1824, p. 91 (my transl.)

the imagination, leading to an overall intensification of psycho-physical vitality.²⁶ Cabanis points out that because of these benefits, writers, scholars, and artists are often heavy coffee drinkers, and many writers have labelled coffee “an intellectual drink”. The composer, Johan Sebastian Bach, who was a great coffee drinker, even dedicated a cantata to it.

In the seventeenth century coffee spread in Europe and gave its name to London’s coffeehouses, where politics and civic principles were discussed. Subsequently, it inspired a group of intellectuals to publish the eponymous journal (*Il caffè*) in Milan between 1764 and 1766. Renowned as a healthy and pleasurable drink, during the Enlightenment coffee contributed to a new form of sociality, made of open dialogue and democratic principles. Furthermore, today it is still ingrained in the Italian culture that a cup of coffee in the company of others is the best way to forget one’s sorrows and accelerate a healing process.

The drinking of coffee allows us to highlight trends within contemporary aesthetics by taking into account popular culture and everyday practices. In this way, we can consider aesthetics not only a philosophy of art but a way of “thinking through the body”²⁷, reconnecting us to the Greek etymology of the word *aisthesis* (perception).

SEE: I. 32; III. 17

²⁶ R. Shusterman, *Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal*, “The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, vol. 57, 3, 1999, pp. 299-313.

²⁷ Shusterman, Richard: *Thinking through the Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.