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**EDITORIAL:  
FORGOTTEN EVERYDAYS**

**Elisabetta Di Stefano & Carsten Friberg & Max Rynänen**

# EDITORIAL: FORGOTTEN EVERYDAYS

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When we thought of the theme of forgotten everyday for this issue, the theme we had in mind raised the question: forgotten by whom? The subtitle of the call reveals an answer when it says 'expanding Everyday Aesthetics'. We thought of the discussion tagged Everyday Aesthetics. Everyday Aesthetics as a philosophical trend (born in the USA and spread also in European countries) focuses on Western philosophical tradition, in particular analytic and pragmatist philosophy. We thought it peculiar how examples of the everyday are always from a middle-class point of view of the Global North. Our idea was to ask what happens when we extend this scope to forgotten everyday, i. e. what would appear in different points of view and other geographical areas, or in a historical perspective.

Can this discipline also include other forms of everyday life? Have they been forgotten because no one has taken interest in them, because middle-class examples were just more obvious for the writers, or because they cannot really be discussed as a matter of aesthetics?

Perhaps aesthetics in a broader sense forgets about everyday living but in a perspective of Everyday Aesthetics that explicitly stresses a focus on it, we would try and reach beyond academic and middle class everyday to other forms – to the migrant, the inhabitant in megacities' slum, the farming life at the limit of existence because of climate and/or industrial interests, or at the opposite end for someone who is rich and does not need to work. We did not think that people from these groups would write for our special issue of *Popular Inquiry*, maybe, but we thought that it could be possible to get something that touched upon these everyday and, to be precise, to their non-middle-class worlds – but it should be possible to at least ask questions, open gates, and sketch out what it means to have an everyday, outside of what most academics discuss as normal. We are of course not the first to do this. Ben Highmore writes in the introduction to the *Everyday Life Reader* (2002):

Everyday life is a vague and problematic phrase. Any assumption that it is simply ‘out there’, as a palpable reality to be gathered up and described, should face an immediate question: whose everyday life? Often enough, however, such questions are purposefully ignored. To invoke the everyday can often be a sleight of hand that normalizes and universalizes particular values, specific world-views. Politicians, for instance, are often fond of using terms like ‘everyday life’ or ‘ordinary people’ as a way of hailing constituents to a common culture: people like us, lives like ours. The underside of this, of course, is that this everyday life is haunted by implicit ‘others’, who supposedly live outside the ordinary, the everyday.”<sup>i</sup>

With the issues raised by Highmore one can even ask why the everyday should be a topic for aesthetics. In a philosophical perspective, something that is in need of theoretical reflections when it becomes a problem – when questions hitherto answered in our practices no longer find sufficient explanations in our established interpretation. When the knowledge embedded in practice becomes insufficient, we request new and different understandings, and we take a step away from the practice to view it from a distance and to achieve a better understanding. Concerning the everyday, we want to understand its social conflicts, power structures, existential challenges – to name some issues. But is it also in need of aesthetic theory? It becomes important to consider what it is we want to know to which aesthetics can give an answer.

The difficulty about answering such questions is that any approach will frame the analysis and discourse in accordance with the implied assumptions and interpretation. A sufficient answer to what we want to know depends on what we consider to be sufficient which depends on expectations coming from our view on the everyday and on what understanding of aesthetics we have. The significance of the everyday has been excessively discussed in *Everyday Aesthetics*. With a view from outside these discussions, one wonders about the choice of examples of everyday life like commodified design and urban activities rather than, e. g. popular culture that already has been a topic of discussion. A question that appears here is what sort of everyday the *Everyday Aesthetics* wants to discuss. A decade ago, an excessive study demonstrated how behavioral scientists made claims about human psychology drawn from a narrow empirical foundation, what the authors called WEIRD societies, i. e. Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic.<sup>ii</sup> Perhaps researchers in *Everyday Aesthetics* demonstrate a similar bias. This will prove problematic if claims are made about cultural values with a Western middle-class culture as standard. However, it is not always clear if the claims are meant to be applicable in general. How inclusive or limited is it then intended to be? Asking about forgotten everyday life is a way of investigating the potential, limitations, and assumptions made when using *Everyday Aesthetics*

in uncommon examples. Does it have a potential for disclosing aspects of the everyday that would otherwise have remained hidden to us? Are the commonly used examples of everyday a mere coincidence – e. g. when many philosophers choose examples within sight while they are writing, hence a desk, a cup, a chair –, or are they of a kind where forgotten everyday are not forgotten but excluded because Everyday Aesthetics, due to its understanding of aesthetics, have little or nothing to say?

Aesthetic theories are always normative and embedded with ideology. This becomes apparent when asking about the understanding of aesthetics within Everyday Aesthetics. Is the opposition to arts-related aesthetics moving along the same mode of thinking as the one it opposes to then merely applying it on other cultural phenomena, or does it change direction?

What indicates an affirmative answer to the former questions are the frequent references to appreciative practices which depend on a set of values for what is appreciated. At this point, one notices the choice of examples regarding the everyday and art, and one asks oneself if this choice reveals the authors' set of values, those of a Western, middle-class art-lover. Could the examples also be of forgotten everyday? Are they forgotten by chance and could be included, or are they of no interest because they belong to a different sphere?

The question can become more controversial as it could be one of whether the understanding of aesthetics conceals critical aspects of aesthetics – what is prominent in discourses on aesthetics that reflect on what avantgarde artists were intending, until they were taken over by art-institutions and made harmless by them. Does Everyday Aesthetics work on the same premises as these institutions and turn conflicts and problems of the forgotten everyday into something harmless? Or does it provide analysis to understand them and perhaps change them?

One reason why this more controversial question comes up is the lack of interest in popular culture that is very prominent in everyday life since World War II, also as a social and cultural changing force, and in forms of art about the everyday since 19<sup>th</sup> century, often with more explicit desires for changes than the popular culture, but not as successful.

Since Romanticism, art could appear as a revolutionary opposition to the existing world, inviting us to create alternatives. This form was paralleled, or met, by reactionary forms conserving the norms and ideals of the existing world. One can view art since the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a battleground between revolution and restoration with opposing intentions of the everyday. Of course, this is not the only interpretation possible, but it clarifies how institutions of art and aesthetic theories become combatant in interpretations. Artworks with revolutionary intentions can be appropriated by theories that see artistic objects rather than means of communication, education or knowledge, and avant-gardes may find themselves appropriated by art-institutions

and academic discourses. Regrettably, aesthetic theories about the social and political intentions of avant-garde art seem to have very little to offer about the everyday because it is viewed through the critical lenses of art that end up stealing the picture.

This brings back the question of the understanding of aesthetics in *Everyday Aesthetics*, whether it follows some arts-related forms of aesthetics or takes a different direction. Is it about finding moments of aesthetic value in the everyday and are these values then appreciative or transformative? Does appreciative also mean affirmative? Or is it an opportunity to change perspective? Is the question about the understanding of aesthetics also revealing another question: who theorizes, i.e. who is in the position to make aesthetic theories and for what interests? Perhaps this helps us answer the problem of the forgotten everyday. *Everyday Aesthetics* questions a specific kind of aesthetic theories that narrowly focus on art, but does it also question the normative assumptions of its own position in aesthetics? Does it answer a need for theoretical reflection and explanation of phenomena of the everyday that enable us to understand these phenomena because it gives an explanatory voice to them? Or is it in danger of appropriating these phenomena just like the institutions of art do with rebellious art, i.e. neutralizing them in light of an evaluating view on the different phenomena? Can forgotten everyday become part of *Everyday Aesthetics*?

We can still see the need to not just discuss a design vase on the table – or a life where there is a lot of pastime, or to write in an article “when we go out in the morning to collect the trash...”, or “when we cross the skies with our private jets, we often...”. But while we are not witnessing this yet, not in our own issue here, we might still say that at least it has raised some questions concerning what can and could be discussed in *Everyday Aesthetics*.

As an autonomous part of the everyday issue, we publish the special issue *Cars*, edited by Scott Elliott - focusing on artistic research.

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<sup>i</sup> Ben Highmore, “Introduction: Questioning everyday life,” in *The Everyday Life Reader*, edited by Ben Highmore (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

<sup>ii</sup> Joseph Henrich, Stephen J. Heine, Ara Norenzayan, “The weirdest people in the world”, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 2010, 33:2/3: 1-75. doi:10.1017/S0140525X0999152X