



Aleksandra Kunce
Maria Popczyk

Into the Noise
Anthropological and
Aesthetic
Discourses in Public
Sphere



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Tadeusz Miczka

Recenzent

Ewa Łukaszyk

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Maria Korusiewicz

On a Sunny Day, under a Tree, Chatting: Towards the Aesthetics of the Everyday

So it came to this: I am sitting under the tree,
Beside the river,
On a sunny morning.
It's a trivial event
And history won't claim it.¹

Sitting beside a river, on a sunny day, for no particular reason and with no clear purpose, without having to have “the arid plain behind me” and “London Bridge falling down”² before my eyes, or cleaning the kitchen on a chilly morning or chatting with the friends over a cup of hot cappuccino still appears to be an untrustworthy experience, unauthenticated by philosophical tradition, almost awkward in the perspective of the legacy of modernity with its divorce between the kingdom of art and aesthetic perception and the realm of the everyday. The tradition of modern Western aesthetics has not prepared us for such a trivial event, although on numerous occasions – in the works of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson or Archibald Alison and finding its epitome in the Kantian philosophy – it did

¹ Wisława Szymborska, “Może być bez tytułu,” in Wisława Szymborska, *Wiersze* (Lesko: Bosz, 2003), p. 16. Translation mine.

² T.S. Eliot, “The Waste Land,” in T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), p. 47.

embrace the territory much wider than the artistic object, reaching towards the aesthetics of the beautiful, the picturesque and the sublime to be found in our environment – in nature.

Aesthetics, an offspring of modern rationality, was originally supposed to be a discursive discipline, “a younger sister of logic”.³ Kant’s contribution, revolving around the idea of disinterestedness and distance of a subjective, yet necessary and universal, judgment of taste, left us with the world divided into the separate realms, where the aesthetic was separated from the scientific, the ethical, and, most importantly, from the *praxis* of life. The rift was deepened by the Hegelian idealism, where the proper object of philosophical reflection was primarily a work of art, a lofty product of the spirit. Aesthetic thought, still resonant of the Platonic visions, claimed the idea of representation, constructing the order of being and its evocation, recapturing or illumination in art. Representation, perceived as creating an image that stands *in-between*, on the *island position*, transgressing both the sphere of thought and the sphere of the world, was considered a distinct plane and activity. Thus, the issue of the position of art in reference to other human activities was usually resolved in favour of aesthetic isolation. Its foundation was “a belief in ontological discreteness of aesthetic perception and the corresponding removal of art objects from the other objects and activities that surround us.”⁴

However, since the 1960s, this arbitrary position, almost automatically accepted by the successive generations, has seemed to be fading away, imperceptibly turning into one more black-and-white sketch on the estimable pages of the history of Western thought. Rediscovering its half-forgotten origins under the thin paving of theory isolating the

³ Franciszek Chmielowski, “Filozofia, estetyka, metafizyka,” *Diametros* 3 (March 2005), p. 10.

⁴ Arnold Berleant, *Re-thinking Aesthetics: Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and The Arts* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), p. 59.

aesthetic *zone* within the *temple* of art, aesthetics reaches toward the glimmering abundance of life itself recognizing its interrelatedness and processuality, elusiveness and ambience. The autonomous and self-contained term *aesthetics* seeks support of the adjectives in order to move forward: we would rather talk of *pragmatic aesthetics*, *engaged aesthetics*, *cognitive aesthetics*, *functional aesthetics*, *everyday aesthetics*, *practical aesthetics*, or *social aesthetics*, or direct our attention to the particular aspects of reality and develop, among others, the aesthetics of violence, power, or politics, the aesthetics of the environment, built and natural, of public spaces or, so appropriate today, the aesthetics of ruins. This broadened perspective has revealed the power lingering within the aesthetic: the judgments of taste, conditioned by culture, politics, ideology and religion, and shaped by emotional needs, appear to be less subjective than the Kantian philosophy claimed. Our aesthetic sense can be guided or even manipulated to serve a specific agenda. On the other hand, we are more and more aware of the fact that it is aesthetic attraction and emotional attachment that enable us to cultivate a respectful attitude to the world around us.⁵

Art as the model of an aesthetic object

The expansion of the scope of aesthetics has been interwoven into the major changes in the Western approach to *what is*, epitomizing the progress in science and decompartmentalization of reality perceived as processual, interrelated and dynamic. In the dust of the falling towers of metaphysics, the only way out seemed to be the reorientation of philosophy and a great ontological comeback – into the greening territories of direct experience threatening us with temporality and ruled by the principles of uncertainty.

⁵ Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 72.

This altered – considerably humbler – worldview has opened up new perspectives for the dialogue between non-Western traditions and Western philosophy, encouraging the tendencies familiar to the Eastern thought: the radical turn to the human subject as the source of power to find a proper dwelling in the world; the processes of melting down the firm “I” of the modern idealistic philosophy into the multiplicity of *drives* or *aggregates*; the emphasis on the phenomenological “presentness” resulting in the re-evaluation of experience as both the source of and the guide to an understanding of the world.⁶

The new paradigm has also manifested itself in the expanded scope of what we perceive and appreciate as art. Having torn down the conventional genre boundaries, the limitations of the self-contained identity and the traditional forms of presentation and reception, art has literally become *frameless*, blurring the established standards of the aesthetic evaluation. The new functions of art have required both art and artists to acquire new *virtues* – the increased self-awareness, the courage of a mythical warrior and the sharpness of sight, since art should not only be able to keep pace with the human journey into the core of our existence but it also has to move forward to the vanguard and become not so much the answer as the precious Promise of an answer to the persistent asking about the Sense. This impossible task has involved the permanent revolution in the name of the truth concealed within the world but “setting” itself in a work of art. (“The nature of art would then be this: the truth of beings setting itself to work. [...] The art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings.”⁷) Thus, art

⁶ Cf. Maria Korusiewicz, “Between the Fields of Fear and Gardens of Compassion: The Approach to Nature in Western and Japanese Tradition,” in *Civilisation and Fear: Anxiety and the Writing of the Subject*, eds. Wojciech Kalaga and Agnieszka Kliś (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

⁷ Martin Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Art and Its Significance*, ed. Stephen David Ross (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 259, 261.

has grown to the status of discourse, opening the space of freedom explored by arbitrary artistic choices.

However, freedom and autonomy have also brought about some perturbing consequences, almost transparent for the audiences. The barriers set by the traditional perception of the ethical or the moral as inherent in art have melted down allowing for harsh diagnoses.⁸ In spite of its *shrill sonority*, art has come before the abyss of *silence* becoming the “pitiless art” of Paul Virilio.⁹ The reality of the “outside” world has once more become just an inexhaustible reservoir of resources, used or disregarded at the whim of an artist rarely burdened with any concern except the final artistic vision.¹⁰ Art, despite its ostensible “mixing” with reality, breaking through all the barriers of the past and being apparently embedded in the lambency of life, in fact *never* loses its distinctiveness, its own narration. John Cage’s 1952 composition “4’33”, performed in the absence of deliberate sound, has served as the illustration of this distinctiveness

⁸ Art employing the Heideggerian concept of *aletheia* – the concealed truth that requires unconcealment, unearthing – has been fated to the indifference and anaesthetization of a surgeon’s instrument cutting into the body of our existence (Walter Benjamin’s term, p. 534), and brutalization of means (Andrzej Zybertowicz, *Poznanie i przemoc: stadium z nie-klasycznej filozofii wiedzy* (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 1995). Contemporary debates eagerly place modernism with its visions of transformation of the world, revolution and rebirth at the foundation of fascist concepts (Cf. Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* [London: Palgrave, MacMillan, 2007]) developing much older statements: “Instead of being based on ritual it begins to be based on another practice – politics.” Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility,” in *Art and Its Significance*, ed. Stephen David Ross (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 529.

⁹ Cf. Paul Virilio, *Art and Fear* (Continuum: New York, 2006).

¹⁰ Freedom in its best form should be founded as a moment of construction of one’s identity in relation to the context of the world. Cf. Maria Korusiewicz, “Czy pozwolić bytowi być, czyli zapiski o rytuałach wolności w sztuce,” in *Rytuały codzienności*, eds. Anna Węgrzyniak and Tomasz Stępień (Katowice: Wydawnictwo WSZOP, 2008), p. 72.

for the last six decades. Within the time frame of four minutes and thirty three seconds the everyday with all its implications is cut out of its context and raised to the meta-level, becoming a complex semiotic entity.

The distinctiveness of art was paralleled by the distinctiveness of aesthetics seen as the philosophy of art. Its famous “crisis”¹¹ repeatedly proclaimed in the twentieth century was just another name for the quest for more efficient demarcation lines that would preserve the separation of art from the factual. Aesthetics, overlooking the importance of the world beyond art, failed to account for the major part of our aesthetic life. The wide range of propositions, from the formalism of Clive Bell and Edward Bullough and “art-as-experience” of John Dewey to Arthur Danto’s powerful idea of “the artworld,” Monroe Beardsley’s contribution, or the texts presented in the bulky anthologies edited by Joseph Margolis and William Kennick,¹² despite the crucial differences in the construction of aesthetic paradigms, revolved around the work of art as a model object of aesthetic appreciation. As Berleant and Carlson state:

At one extreme is the old idea of disinterested contemplation of the sensuous and formal

¹¹ One of the most influential publications on the subject was *Kryzys estetyki*, ed. Maria Gołaszewska (Kraków: PWN/Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1983).

¹² Cf.: Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914); Edward Bullough, “‘Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle,” *British Journal of Psychology* 5 (1912): 87–117; John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934), vol. 10 of *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987); Arthur Danto, “The Artworld,” *Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 571–584; George Dickie, *Aesthetics, An Introduction* (New York: Pegasus, 1971); Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1958); *Philosophy Looks at the Arts; Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph Margolis (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962); *Art and Philosophy; Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. William Kennick (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1964).

properties of isolated and solitary objects of art and, on the other, the new paradigm of emotionally and cognitively rich engagement with cultural artifacts, intentionally created by designing intellects, informed by both art historical traditions and art critical practices, and deeply embedded in a complex, many-faceted artworld.¹³

Today, at the beginning of the new century, what seems to be a challenge for Western art appears to be an almost natural path for aesthetics; the transgression of its established boundaries is a pending process. So, we have left, as Arnold Berleant argues, “the beautifully cut diamond of an art object in order to immerse ourselves in its environment discovering its aesthetic dimension.”¹⁴ Challenging traditional theory, Berleant postulates the need of aesthetics that would be open to both art and the non-art. Wolfgang Iser, discussing similar issues, goes even further, suggesting that aesthetics that would embrace the full scope of human sensuality and human experience should place the aesthetic at the foundation of human existence in the world.¹⁵ However, according to the majority of scholars,¹⁶ in order to succeed, it needs its criteria, objectives and hierarchy of values to be redefined with respect to the variety of fields of interests, in which neither the distinctive space of the artworld nor the communication

¹³ Arnold Berleant and Allen Carlson, Introduction to *The Aesthetic of Natural Environments*, eds. Arnold Berleant and Allen Carlson (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004), p. 13.

¹⁴ Arnold Berleant, *Prze-mysleć estetykę*, trans. Maria Korusiewicz and Tomasz Markiewka, (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), p. 10.

¹⁵ Cf. Wolfgang Iser, *Estetyka poza estetyką*, trans. Katarzyna Gućalska (Kraków: Universitas, 2005).

¹⁶ Christopher Dowling has proposed a more limited task, relying on the criteria associated with the paradigmatic art. For Dowling critical significance and discursiveness are a guaranty of high aesthetic value and cannot be replaced by elusive criteria and intuitive opinions. Cf. Christopher Dowling, “The Aesthetics of Daily Life,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 3 (2010): 225–242.

necessary in the practical applications of the theories based on the expressive functions constitute a sufficient plane of reference. Thus the perception of the aesthetic blooming around us, beyond the limits of art, forces us to start such an investigation from new locations: from the multiplicity of phenomena of the everyday, approached, as Yuriko Saito maintains, on their own terms.

The everyday and aesthetic thought

The aesthetics of the everyday constitutes an influential field within the contemporary aesthetic theory with dozens of publications and growing impact on the altered perception of the nature of aesthetic experience.¹⁷ Its origins are usually found in the proposition of John Dewey, who, as early as in 1934, suggested redirecting attention from the

¹⁷ The early studies pointing towards the everyday include: Joseph Kupfer, *Experience as Art: Aesthetics in Everyday Life* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983); David Novitz, *The Boundaries of Art: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Place of Art in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Crispin Sartwell, *The Art of Living: Aesthetics of the Ordinary in World Spiritual Traditions* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995); Thomas Leddy, "Everyday Surface Aesthetic Qualities: 'Neat', 'Messy', 'Clean', 'Dirty'," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 3 (summer, 1995): 259–268; Kevin Melchionne, "Artistic Dropouts," in *Aesthetics: The Big Questions*, ed. Carolyn Korsmeyer (New York: Blackwell, 1998); Yuriko Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics," *Philosophy and Literature* 25, no. 1 (2002): 87–95; Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); and Richard M. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). (The above choice of literature is based on the list included in Kevin Melchionne's publication "Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life: A Reply to Dowling," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 51, no. 4 (2011) 51: 437–442. Within the last decade the major publication appears to be *Everyday Aesthetics* by Yuriko Saito, a Japanese philosopher currently living and lecturing in the United States. The study is the outcome of the author's research conducted for more than twenty years. Cf. Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

world of so-called art to the practices of everyday existence, granting the still ennobling status of aesthetic experience to the sound-vision-and-smell of “the fire engine rushing by” or to “the delight of the housewife in tending her plants.”¹⁸ Although particular aspects of Dewey’s account are frequently criticized for clinging to the artistic object as a model of aesthetic appreciation (the idea of qualitative unity, closure or consummation) his general concept is still valid today.

Contemporary approaches cover a large field of interests and issues, yet, despite the multiplicity of arguments and concepts, they seem to share some traits that most authors recognize and define.¹⁹

Firstly, the turn towards ordinary moments of our existence entails the re-evaluation of the full scope of human sensuality, including the neglected contact senses of smell, taste and touch.²⁰ Thus the notion of aesthetic experience, contemplative and (frequently) disinterested in the case of art, should also embrace action-oriented, often unreflected, or intuitive judgments and the emotionally engaged appreciation of phenomena whose qualities have never been included within the traditional scope of aesthetics. The messy, the neat, the dirty and the clean, the new, the fresh or the prime and the old, the decayed or the decomposed, or even the blooming or the withered, the dried out or the muddy: these qualities marking the temporary stages of the ever-changing, transient world around us have been traditionally inscribed into the plane inferior to the paradigmatic art of the Western tradition. We should not forget that in our history the common factor for the denigration of the phenomenal reality, both in religious and philosophical terms, was its major inherent feature:

¹⁸ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Recognizing the significance of Yuriko Saito’s contribution I will frequently refer to her concepts as the most influential in the field.

²⁰ Cf. Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste; Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). The subject is also discussed by Arnold Berleant, Emily Brady, and Richard Shusterman.

its phenomenal, temporary nature, the impermanence of all things and, consequently, their imperfection. The inherent properties of bodily experiences, their natural relation to the basic instincts of sexuality and survival, were perceived as offensive both to the Western sense of morality and the idea of beauty, typically identified with the aesthetic. However, if we look underneath the surface of the philosophical tradition, it appears that the contemptuous approach to these experiences, which threaten us with the close contact with broadly understood contamination and dirt, derives from the depths of our biological and human history, as Mary Douglas proves in her famous study *Purity and Danger*.²¹ Therefore, the task of changing this position undertaken by everyday aesthetics seems to be a challenge, requiring educational projects and carefully prepared campaigns.

The other issue, frequently brought up by the cognitivists, among others Allen Carlson, is the need for some structuring of “free” and direct experience of the everyday in order to find the space for the necessary minimum of a contemplative, intellectual element. This gesture towards the Kantian aesthetics is accompanied by acknowledging the relevance of knowledge, derived from both common sense and science, and some training in aesthetic perception of things.

We cannot appreciate everything; there must be limits and emphases in our aesthetic appreciation of nature as they are in our appreciation of art. Without such limits and emphases our experience [...] would only be ‘a meld of physical sensations’ without any meaning or significance. It would be what William James calls a ‘blooming, buzzing confusion’.²²

²¹ Cf. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

²² Allen Carlson, “Appreciation and the Natural Environment,” in *The Aesthetic of Natural Environments*, p. 71.

The validity of this viewpoint may be questioned within the scope of environmental aesthetics, especially the aesthetics of nature, weather, and the similar, where the metaphysical element is always powerful and allows for pure elation, it seems well justified in reference to the built environments and the artefacts of the everyday.

Another crucial issue is the authorial identity and the originality of a work of art. These essential requirements of a modern artwork have no equivalent in the everyday where the individual “author” is usually nonexistent, and things happen, exist or function as a result of cumulative efforts, circumstances and, frequently, chance. Thus instead of discursive properties and the quest for the author’s message and intention, we talk about sensual experience, pragmatic sources of appreciation, practical values of a given *object*, and possibilities of further transformations due to human activity or natural causes. Here, things can be modified, repaired, re-painted, cleaned, put into parts, or organized into collections, they are subjected to environmental factors, biological or geological processes, climate changes and so on. On the other hand, *natural* objects or phenomena – a thunderstorm, a flock of birds in the sky, grey pebbles in the river – are frequently beyond our reach. Their aesthetic qualities also change, just as the ways of experiencing them aesthetically, since no stable identity is required within the realm of the everyday. The very nature of reality makes us experience things as forming the general pattern of life, since objects, moments, actions and phenomena never appear separately, like framed paintings in a museum or successive pieces performed by an orchestra. The ontology of the everyday is its interrelatedness.²³ Let me quote Saito:

When we experience non-art objects, we do identify objects in many ways: the corner stone, the oak tree in my front yard, my black dress, Old Faithful, my office at school, and so on. However,

²³ Melchionne, *Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life*, p. 6.

they are subject to vicissitudes and are always experienced in certain temporal context which changes the nature of our experience.²⁴

The third frequently observed trait is looking for inspiration in non-Western traditions, especially Japanese culture famous for its aesthetically-oriented design objects enhancing the quality of everyday life. The aesthetic sensibility and appreciation of the temporal, transient phenomenality is the core of the Japanese aesthetic tradition, where gestures and actions, objects and the environment constitute a dynamic, aesthetically vibrant reality, which, however, does not affect the importance of more *Western* kinds of artistic phenomena such as literature, theatre or fine arts. The paradox of simultaneous distinctiveness and unity of both *types* in terms of their aesthetic evaluation seems to be the most intriguing question for Western observers.

The traditional Buddhist philosophy also offers some irreplaceable notions grasping the aesthetic values reflecting the impermanence of things and dynamic unity of all beings. The most basic one is the famous idea of emptiness. Originally understood as no-thing-ness, over the centuries has been transformed into a virtue of emptying one's ego in order to "see" the world: to become one with the world while remaining oneself.

Cultivation of artistic excellence requires 'emptying' one's ego, whether painting, poetry-making, garden design, arranging flowers, tea ceremony, or martial arts. The treatment of materials and subject matters in these art forms helps us cultivate an aesthetic sensibility by listening to the object's voice, respecting its native disposition.²⁵

²⁴ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, p. 25.

²⁵ Yuriko Saito, "Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics," a presentation prepared for the conference *Old World and New World*

When we replace the typical confrontational model of relationships of the Western world with the one derived from the ancient Buddhist idea of all-encompassing compassion²⁶, we come close to understanding both the paradigm of the logic of paradox – *is and yet is not* – underlying the process of *emptying* the ego to raise it to its *fullness*, and the continuity of all forms, separate, yet forming a unity.²⁷

Zen Buddhism as a philosophy is extremely controversial. Its opponents claim that the essence of Zen is non-mental, and conditioned by “no method. Man only attains correct vision from the moment when no idea, no fabrication of the mind any longer comes between him and the fact.”²⁸ Others argue that behind the meditative practices of Zen hides a deep and sublime philosophy, developed over the centuries.²⁹ The logic of paradox as the core of Zen Buddhism also constitutes the underpinnings of aesthetic appreciation in Japanese culture; it is direct, yet mediated by tradition, just like famous traditional viewing of blooming cherry trees, watching the moon, or tea ceremony.³⁰

Perspectives on Environmental Philosophy 2011 in the International Society of Environmental Ethics, Nijmegen, 14–18. 06. 2011, p. 2.

²⁶ “Compassion always signifies that the opposites are one in the dynamic reciprocity of their own contradictory identity [...]. If the concept of compassion has not been foundational for Western culture then I think there is a basic difference between Eastern and Western cultures in this regard.” Kitaro Nishida, *Last Writings. Nothingness and the Religious Worldview* trans. and ed. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 106.

²⁷ The logic of paradox (Jap. *hari no ri*) based on the contradictory identity of the opposites, is claimed to be the dominant logical paradigm of the Japanese Zen Buddhism philosophy. Cf. Agnieszka Kozyra, *Filozofia zen* (Warszawa: PWN, 2004), p. 10.

²⁸ Robert Linssen, *Living Zen*, trans. Diana Abrahams-Curiel (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1958), p. 46.

²⁹ Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), p. IX.

³⁰ Japanese aesthetics also recognizes the aesthetic distance and the contemplative type of experience, i.e. enjoying the view of a dry garden (*karesansui*), or viewing the moon.

Much more “liberated” way of appreciating things aesthetically is suggested by the authors echoing Taoist tradition, the most frequently quoted among which seems to be a cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan.

An adult must learn to be yielding and careless like a child if he were to enjoy nature polymorphously. He needs to slip into old clothes so that he could feel free to stretch out on the hay beside the brook and bathe in the meld of physical sensations; the smell of the hay and of horse dung; the warmth of the ground, its hard and soft contours; the warmth of the sun tempered by breeze; the tickling of an ant [...] the sound of water over the pebbles [...]. Such an environment might break all the formal rules of euphony and aesthetics, substituting confusion for order and yet be wholly satisfying.³¹

The Taoist concept of *wu wei*, letting things go, accepting them as they are and immersing oneself in the flow of existence, poses a challenge for Western thought scared of *substituting confusion for order*, or losing control over the *polymorphous* experience. However, Chinese insights seem to be more tempting for the aesthetics of the natural environment, as the numerous studies of Graham Parkes demonstrate.

Old cultures of the Far East are hardly the only traditions in which we seek models of the long forgotten communion of man and the world. Similar intuitions and the opulence of motifs is also found in these cultural traditions which pre-date art, or in contemporary tribal cultures, i.e. Australian Aborigines or Native Americans, which tend to see the world as the continuum of processes, with the aesthetic and the moral, the spiritual and the mundane,

³¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, quoted by: Allen Carlson, “Appreciation and the Natural Environment,” p. 70.

the individual and the common rarely separated. So-called folk art, crafts, traditions, rituals and myths reveal the social functions of the aesthetic qualities of the everyday phenomena, creating what today we would like to call “the aesthetic welfare,”³² so desirable in our troubled times. On the other hand, while learning from the others, Western aesthetics of the everyday is deeply interested in its own “here and now”, and “does not need to be exoticized to justify its importance and claim its full impact.”³³ What it aims at is the aesthetic awareness that opens our senses and our mind to the world we live in.

The forth, and the last issue is the blurred distinction between the ethical or moral and the aesthetic. The growing recognition of the ethical dimension of aesthetic choices, judgments and experiences has significantly changed both the theoretical and practical approaches to the functions of the aesthetic in private interpersonal space as well as in public spaces. The ramifications of this link are so far-reaching that it deserves a closer examination.

The aesthetic of the everyday and public spaces

The aesthetics directed towards our environment and our everyday existence plays “a crucial role in our collective project of world-making.”³⁴ The results of its application can range from the threatening, negative impact to the positive influence on people’s life. The twentieth-century experiences of ideological and political relevance of the aesthetic in public spaces revealed its violent manipulative power and its persuasive strength. It possesses all the properties of the perfect instrument to control people’s

³² Yrjö Sepänmaa, “Aesthetics in Practice: Prolegomenon,” in *Practical Aesthetics in Practice and in Theory*, ed. Martti Honkanen (Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 1995), p. 15.

³³ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, p. 3.

³⁴ Saito, “Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics,” p. 2.

emotions and sentiments, to shape group identities or instil nationalistic or ideological pride. The type of architecture, urban design, colours of the flag or stripes on a prisoner's jacket convey messages whose influence is irresistible, yet the codes remain almost transparent. The invisible wars are being fought before our very eyes. The public space appears to be neither the space of a free person, as the Greeks claimed, nor of the consensus of the well-educated promoted by the Enlightenment idea described by Jürgen Habermas.

The downfall of the public space is brought about by the impossibility of a rational debate, which is prevented by the fact that the discourses taking place within this space involve a whole range of contradictory interests. In the fragmented reality it seems more effective to allow for a number of diverse discourses, which are transient but exist both in the institutional sphere and beyond it. Art is best positioned to fulfil this role when it annoys, provokes and criticizes, but at the same time comments on the events taking place in this reality. And whereas the place of art in the contemporary Western cultures appears well-established: art is critical, the status of traditional aesthetics is ambivalent.

This ambivalence is diminished in the approach suggested by everyday aesthetics: the positive aesthetic qualities manifested in the everyday facilitate the conscious building of *good* relations with our environment and with people around us. The foundation of such good relations is knowledge, empathy and attention enabling us to approach otherness without violating its nature "on its own terms." Saito, the author of this concept, derives it from the definition of a *good person* given by Yi-Fu Tuan.

One kind of definition of a good person, or a moral person, is that the person does not impose his or her fantasy on another. That is, he or she is willing to acknowledge the reality of other individuals, or even of the tree or the rock. So to

be able to stand and listen. That to me is a moral capacity, not just an intellectual one.³⁵

The moral urge to “empty one’s ego” expressed by kindness and benevolence is a matter of pedagogy rooted in the traditions of a given society, community or family. This moderate cognitive approach is shared by James Howard Kunstler, the author of *Geography of Nowhere* (1993), who looks for remedies for our deteriorating landscapes, “housing tracts, mega-malls, junked cities and ravaged countryside that make up the everyday environment” we have to face. Kunstler argues that “the culture of good place-making like the culture of farming or agriculture is a body of knowledge and acquired skills.”³⁶ Therefore, it requires educational efforts directed towards the cultural traditions and aiming at the future positive development. However, our contemporariness does not conduce easily to such projects of community making; we suffer a shortage of tools which would provide desirable solutions. Our cultural *core* is formed by autonomy, independence and weak social ties and networks, hence the necessity of supplementing them with additional layers of skills and emotions that would build tight social ties and promote our participation in social networks.

Among the possible options, everyday aesthetics has been gaining ground. Its major advantage is that it combines the aesthetic and the ethical as two essential components of culture generating values and shaping relations with the environment. Their association echoes the estimable

³⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, after: Yuriko Saito, “Appreciating Nature on Its Own Terms,” in *Nature, Aesthetics and Environmentalism*, eds. Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 151.

³⁶ James Howard Kunstler, after: Wendy McClure and Fred A. Hurand, “Re-engaging the Public in the Art of Community Place-Making,” in: *Downtowns: Revitalizing the Centers of Small Urban Communities*, ed. Michael A. Burayidi (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 107.

ideas of the past where *kalos* was close to *kagathos*, and philosophical theory was meant to serve the *praxis* of life. Linking the two spheres has a profound impact on the evaluation of traditional instrumentation of art-centred aesthetics.

Aesthetic value fit for disinterested contemplation of a work of art, alienated from the ethical sphere and from the natural world and, eventually, informing the view of the world becomes a *false* value,³⁷ a sign of passivity and helplessness in the face of the cumulating dilemmas of contemporariness. Overcoming the comfortable habits of looking through the pane of glass and engaging aesthetics in the affairs of the daily life, as postulated by Berleant or Saito, is a reasonable proposition since our aesthetic response to them has a surprising degree of power in shaping the world and, subsequently, the quality of life.³⁸

Aesthetics directed towards the everyday, engaged and active, cannot avoid the ethical evaluation, taking into account the relationship between people's aesthetic reaction to a given phenomenon and their decisions. The positive reaction encourages protective gestures, the negative one results in indifference, neglect or rejection. The impact of such evaluations on our environment hardly needs an explanation. What is more, the appropriation of this power of the aesthetic may serve specific social purposes, from environmental policy, through health services or educational projects, to so-called participative designs engaging the public in building the common space. This strategy, however, in light of historical facts, "needs to negotiate between two poles: aestheticizing certain objects and phenomena and at the same time being mindful of the agenda it is meant to serve."³⁹

In this perspective aesthetic judgments should be both informed and in accord with ethics. Saito emphasizes the

³⁷ Berleant, *Prze-mysleć estetykę*, p. X.

³⁸ Cf. Saito, "Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics," p. 1.

³⁹ Cf. Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, p. 246.

fact that the basis of everyday aesthetic is moral-aesthetic judgments of artefacts and actions relating to the vibrant fabric of everyday existence. There is enough room there for trivia – wrapping and unwrapping of gifts, setting the table for the family reunion and cooking for your loved ones, or using bleach to preserve the wonderful whiteness of your clothes and driving a huge SUV, the trendiest of status vehicles. However, more consequential things are also in focus – designing people-friendly public buildings, preserving endangered species even if they are not attractive to an average viewer, or putting hoardings in the middle of pristine landscapes and localizing garbage dumps in the vicinity of a public beach.

Let me call these judgments “moral-aesthetic” for want of a better term [...] I hold that these judgments are aesthetic judgments insofar as they are derived from our sensuous (often bodily) experience of the objects, different from other moral judgments.⁴⁰

These judgments refer to the notions that are rarely brought up in the context of aesthetics, but in this case, do affect the aesthetic values: *respect* for the matter and/or creative process, respect for the people participating in these processes and for intended users⁴¹; *humility* in the face of the task; *responsibility* for one’s actions, and, most importantly, *care*. Donald Norman, the author of *The Design for Everyday Things*, puts emphasis on the fact that what really matters is “care, planning, thought and concern for others.”⁴² All of these can be epitomized in the concept of thoughtfulness, “Thoughtfulness is beautiful.”⁴³

Transgressing the private space, thoughtfulness appears to be the essential prerequisite of two powerful ideas: the

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 208.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 207.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Mariel Semal, quoted in: Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, p. 208.

concept of the basic life good within the sphere of the commons, and the notion of aesthetic welfare achieved through the working of our emotional system engaged in the social patterns of positive communication. Helmut Hirsch, an American neurobiologist, points out:

There is a saying, – It is our emotions that make us think. As I see it, an increase in goodness requires going beyond the intellectual approaches to the situations we face: we must reach into the deeper and hopefully broader emotional underpinning of all that we say and do. To increase goodness we must develop perspectives and approaches that include it all.⁴⁴

Nourished by our emotions, the aesthetic founded on thoughtfulness would also refer to the category of work as defined by John Locke, i.e. determining the intuitive *sense of property* and the natural need to direct our efforts to improve what is perceived as *ours*, yet shared with others. Using the title of Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott's book we may say that the path leads *From Beauty to Duty*.⁴⁵

In this context Saito poses a controversial question opening the door to the normative aesthetics: "Can't environmental aesthetics include not only an analysis of what 'is' our aesthetic response, but also an exploration of an 'aesthetic ought'?"⁴⁶ The issue, threatening the freedom of aesthetic judgments, remains unsolved but most aestheticians within the field of non-art aesthetics tend to agree.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Helmut Hirsch, "Confronting Our Emotional Brain. A Neuroscientist Views Humans at a Crossroads," *Old World and New World Perspectives on Environmental Philosophy* 2011, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2008.

⁴⁶ Saito, "Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics," p. 6.

⁴⁷ Those include Marcia Eaton, Emily Brady, and Ronald Hepburn, among others.

Hence the link between the notion of thoughtfulness and the idea of the civil commons, with all its rights and duties, understood as a “human agency in personal, collective or institutional form which protects and enables the access of all members of a community to basic life good.⁴⁸” Basic life good will not grow without properly maintained channels of communication which can be supported by the aesthetic literacy directed towards the full scope of human environment, including art. To this end, everyday aesthetics functions as a form of positive social communication introducing the natural and built environment into the space of social relations. There emerges the notion of *environmental justice* in reference to the people, animals, plants, and places we live *with*.

This short presentation of everyday aesthetics would be incomplete without at least signalling the issue of its general orientation towards the totality of existence, and the shift away from the purely anthropocentric point of view. *Social* communication embraces the non-human sphere as well, challenging the traditional western notions of *nature* and *culture*. Instead of placing them in opposition to each other, we should rather see them as the dynamic existential continuum of common existence.

The most promising way to approach this continuum with respect, care and thoughtfulness and to retain the ability to wonder and enjoy its flow is the appreciation that would recognize the value of the category of *gift* with all its implications. According to Peter Barnes the social and natural environments we inhabit

have two common characteristics: they're all gifts, and they're all shared. A gift is something we receive, as opposed to something we earn. A shared

⁴⁸ John McMurtry (2001), quoted in: Daniel Mishori, “Conceptualizing the Commons: On the Rhetoric of Environmental Rights and Public Ownership,” *Old World and New World Perspectives on Environmental Philosophy* 2011, p. 12.

gift is one we receive as members of a community, as opposed to individually. Examples of such gifts include air, water, ecosystems, languages, music, holidays, money, law, mathematics, parks, the Internet, and much more. These diverse gifts are like a river with three tributaries: 'nature, community, and culture'. [...] Indeed, we literally can't live without it, and we certainly can't live well.⁴⁹

Final remarks

The development of the aesthetics of everyday, frequently used as an umbrella term for manifold aesthetic discourses focusing on the phenomena constituting our everyday environments, has brought about major changes in aesthetic theory. Everyday aesthetics is of limited autonomy, guided, at least partially, by knowledge provided by natural sciences and humanities. As the "engaged aesthetics" depending on emotions, sensuality and the directness of experience, it embraces the full range of forms of aesthetic appreciation, from contemplative through participative to active creation. It also has functional ramifications and the practical, teleological dimension. After all, "we are moved to act more often, more consistently, and more profoundly by the experience of beauty in all of its forms than by intellectual arguments, abstract appeals to duty, or even by fear."⁵⁰

Its impact on everyday life signals the need of normative everyday aesthetics to be developed alongside the descriptive and meta-aesthetics (however, such decision would affect the subjectivity and freedom inherent in our aesthetic evaluations). Nevertheless, the return to moral-aesthetic

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁵⁰ David Orr, quoted in: Saito, "Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics," p. 5.

judgments forming the space of the *ethical aesthetics* opens the gates to new territories, rarely visited by philosophers, where cultural traditions of the moral and the ethical intertwined with the aesthetic may surprise us.

Even if the future of everyday aesthetics is not obvious yet, it appears to be a positive turn in our philosophical tradition. The aesthetic discourse which has spread to the public or interpersonal spaces of our daily life returns to the dialogic situation, to the intimacy of an encounter. The functions of manipulation and control, so powerful in the institutionalized sphere of the commons, seem to have been weakened with the rise of aesthetic awareness of the value of the everyday, offering – together with cultivating aesthetic education – an alternative to the emphasis on mass culture or culture industry with its instruments of competitive pressure. We have an opportunity to re-discover the specific value of care, respect, and thoughtfulness in the realm of impermanence and imperfection, where the aesthetic engagement offers a possibility of designing our dwelling in the reality, a chance to find a place that suits our hand, a place of mutuality. In our daily life the implications of the aesthetic exceed the mere *surplus* of culture; it is a necessary condition of the “aesthetic welfare” of Yrjö Sepänmaa, “an ingredient necessary for a good society, along with justice, equality, freedom, and social welfare.”⁵¹ Aesthetic welfare as such should be included in the fourth generation of human rights, improving our common project of making a more friendly and more beautiful world.⁵²

⁵¹ Saito, “Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics,” p. 3.

⁵² The classification of human rights is based on the idea of Karel Vasak, who in 1979 divided them into three generations, accordingly to the French Revolution’s motto of *liberty, equality, fraternity*. Thus the first-generation human rights deal essentially with the issue of freedoms. The second-generation human rights are related to equality, i.e. to institutions of social life. The third-generation human rights cover group and collective rights, such as community, the tribe and family, as well as healthy environment, intergenerational equity and sustainability. Today, most authors speak of the *fourth* generation of rights such as communication, privacy or copyrights.

Thus, sitting beside a river and reading a book, or resting under a tree and watching the ants, or eating home-made cookies and chatting with friends appears to be a serious matter. Especially, on a sunny day.

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Aleksandra Kunce, Maria Popczyk

Into the Noise. Dyskursy antropologiczne i estetyczne w sferze publicznej

Streszczenie

Into the Noise... to zbiór esejów autorstwa Aleksandry Kunce i Marii Popczyk. Są one poprzedzone wstępem napisanym przez Marię Korusiewicz, który porusza problematykę estetyki codzienności, stanowiącej przeciwwagę dla dyskursów instytucjonalnych.

Rozważania autorek są efektem antropologicznych i estetycznych eksploracji przestrzeni publicznej. Autorki analizują dyskursy, które nadają kształt wspólnotom przestrzennym. W centrum uwagi znalazły się problemy opisu antropologii punktów, perspektyw antropologii integralnej, instytucji uniwersytetu, tożsamości europejskiej, figur zdziwienia i humanistyki, a także zakorzenienia epistemologicznego. Kluczowe są rozważania estetyczne dotyczące miejsca dzieła sztuki w przestrzeniach publicznych miast (na przykładzie Berlina) oraz zorganizowanych instytucjonalnie wystawach muzealnych.

Autorki analizują działania artystyczne będące rodzajem dialogu z zasadami organizacji przestrzeni publicznej. Estetyka jest tu pojmowana jako dziedzina krytyczna nawiązująca do osiągnięć nowej muzeologii i kultury wizualnej, a nie jako filozofia sztuki. Perspektywa antropologiczna i estetyczna uzupełniają się, oświetlając z odmiennych punktów widzenia debaty toczone na temat przestrzeni publicznej.

Aleksandra Kunce, Maria Popczyk

Into the Noise. Anthropologische und ästhetische Diskurse im öffentlichen Raum

Zusammenfassung

Into the Noise... ist eine Sammlung von Essays, die von Aleksandra Kunce und Maria Popczyk veröffentlicht und von Maria Korusiewicz eingeleitet wurde. Das Buch hat zum Thema die Ästhetik der Alltäglichkeit als eines Ausgleichs für institutionelle Diskurse.

Das Buch ist das Ergebnis der anthropologischen und ästhetischen Erforschung des öffentlichen Raumes. Die Verfasserinnen analysieren die den räumlichen Gemeinschaften Gestalt gebenden Diskurse und die damit verbundenen Probleme mit der Darstellung von: der Anthropologie der Punkte, Perspektiven der integralen Anthropologie, der Institution – Universität, der europäischen Identität, den Figuren: Verwunderung und Geisteswissenschaft und epistemologischer Verwurzelung. Die wichtigsten ästhetischen Betrachtungen betreffen die Stelle des Kunstwerkes im öffentlichen Raum der Städte (am Beispiel Berlins) und auf den von den Museen veranstalteten Ausstellungen.

Die Verfasserinnen untersuchen die künstlerische Tätigkeit als eine Art Dialog mit den Regeln nach denen der öffentliche Raum organisiert wird. Ästhetik erscheint hier als ein sich auf die Errungenschaften der neuen Museologie und der virtuellen Kultur beziehender Kritikbereich und nicht als Kunstphilosophie. Anthropologische und ästhetische Betrachtungsweise ergänzen sich und beleuchten aus verschiedenem Blickwinkel die Diskussionen über den öffentlichen Raum.

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Krystian Wojcieszuk

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Katarzyna Gawrych-Olender

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Aleksandra Kunce Professor, PhD

Associate Professor at the University of Silesia, Katowice
and the author of the following books:

Tożsamość i Postmodernizm (Identity and Postmodernism),
Elipsa, Warszawa 2003;

Myśleć Śląsk (Thinking Silesia) co-authored with Zbigniew Kadłubek,
Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2007;

Antropologia punktów. Rozważania przy tekstach Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego
(*The Anthropology of Points. Deliberations on texts by Ryszard Kapuściński*),

Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2008.

Aleksandra Kunce is a member of the Common Ground,
the International Cultural Research Network
and the Polish Society of Cultural Studies.

She is the editor-in-chef of the journal *Anthropos?*
(<http://www.anthropos.us.edu.pl>).

Her main interests are anthropology and the philosophy of culture.

Maria Popczyk PhD in Philosophy

An Assistant Professor in the Department of Cultural Studies
at the University of Silesia, an aesthetician and art theoretician.

Her work focuses on the aesthetics of museum exhibition,
the aesthetics of nature and the aesthetic aspects of emotions.

She is the author of a book *Estetyczne przestrzenie ekspozycji muzealnych. Atrfakty przyrody i dzieła sztuki (The Aesthetic Spaces of Museum Exhibition. Natural Specimens and Works of Art)*, Kraków 2008.

She is also the editor of multi-author publications,
most recently *Przemysleć przyrodę (Rethinking Nature)*
published by *Kultura Współczesna* 2011 (1).

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