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Everyday Aesthetics: Institutionalization and “Normative Turn”

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ABSTRACT. In 2015, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* published for the first time online the entry “Aesthetics of Everyday Life”, authored by Yuriko Saito. This contribution is emblematic of the institutionalization process that Everyday Aesthetics has recently undergone, and that seems to have released it from its ancillary role, by officially recognizing its “academic dignity”. But there is also a critical trend that has been developed in recent years in the field of the aesthetics of everyday life and that stresses two main aspects that greatly contribute to the understanding of Everyday Aesthetics: the will to systematize its methodological approaches through a recognizable nomenclature, and the necessity for a “normative-intersubjective turn” that would avoid the risk of trivializing the aesthetic. Aim of this paper is to address the relevance of such critical trend, in terms of the way in which Everyday Aesthetics is finally undergoing a process of “maturation” after a first stage of acquisition of a critical awareness, as testified to by the first surveys produced in this field (that will be shortly analysed in the first paragraph of this paper). Therefore the core question that this contribution aims to answer is the following: can Everyday Aesthetics be fully recognized as a growing sub-discipline, or is it rather a more general issue, or topic of philosophical discussion?

1. Everyday Aesthetics as a Growing Sub-discipline

The so-called Everyday Aesthetics is progressively gaining ground as a solid and promising line of research in the context of contemporary aesthetics. The increasingly wide literature produced in this area of philosophical investigation corroborates this point. Nevertheless, what emerges as striking is the difficulty to identify univocal coordinates that would allow the assessment of this line of research as a true and proper sub-discipline of

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aesthetics and not as a mere label or umbrella-term for otherwise totally different perspectives.

The various topics that are referred to Everyday Aesthetics by its advocates are clearly elaborated in the rich literature (essays or more voluminous publications), within which Everyday Aesthetics is indeed often connoted in diverse ways, to the extent that it is not clear yet, whether this is an approach that may have a univocal methodology or at least a sufficiently definite cluster of methodological issues. If this were not true, at most we could talk about the “everyday aesthetic” as the *fulcrum* that orientates the contributions published so far. In other words, the point that hence seems to emerge as strategic for the disciplinary understanding of Everyday Aesthetics is asking whether what matters is more the fact that the aesthetic in the everyday has become a relevant issue from various points of view, or the conviction of the necessity of evaluating the eventual pregnancy of a sub-disciplinary field properly defined Everyday Aesthetics, whose consistency, in order to be proved, would need at least some shared methodological and prospective premises, despite the numerous interpretations of it. Therefore the core question that this contribution aims to answer is the following: can Everyday Aesthetics be fully recognized as a growing sub-discipline, or is it rather a more general issue, or topic of philosophical discussion?

This is certainly not the framework in which the numerous contributions dedicated to the topic should be extensively addressed. Our main concern here is rather to verify if and how this research field is gaining, or has gained, awareness about its sub-disciplinary status. Usually, indicators of this passage are the attempts to offer a general overview of the problems that are shared by various approaches (even if mutually competitive). Where is/are the point/s of divergence between them, and what are the reasons for that? Only to the extent that these elements become methodological and theoretical motives we can presume that a research field has begun to move towards the adult stage of its life-cycle, by going beyond the simple first thematisation of a speculative problem.

Hence, an useful way to start dealing with our issue may be the analysis of those entries recently appeared in important editions of Companions, Handbooks, Encyclopedias and Dictionaries of Aesthetics. The contributions that will be considered are the following, in chronological or

der: “Aesthetics of Everyday Life” (Sherri Irvin), *Blackwell Companions to Philosophy. A Companion to Aesthetics* (2009); “Aesthetics of The Everyday” (Crispin Sartwell), *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (2010); “New Directions in Aesthetics” (Paisley Livingston), *The Continuum Companion to Aesthetics/The Bloomsbury Companion to Aesthetics* (2012-15). It should be noted, though, that *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (2013) has not been taken into account in the present survey since it does not include entries nor explicit and ample references to Everyday Aesthetics. A more recent and more extensive contribution that will be analysed in the second paragraph of the paper, in a broader way though, exactly because of these two characteristics, is “Aesthetics of Everyday Life” authored for *Stanford Encyclopedia Online* in 2015 by Yuriko Saito, who also realized for the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* a shorter version of the same entry titled “Everyday Aesthetics” in 2014.

It is noteworthy that the everyday has been a central subject also in other fields of study and, in these frameworks, it has been addressed as a more general problem, certainly not ascribable to the line of investigation at issue here.¹ In Germany a certain interest towards this topic is demonstrated by the entry “Alltag/Alltäglich”, included in *Metzler Lexikon Ästhetik: Kunst, Medien, Design und Alltag* (2006: 9-12)². In this context the progressive overcoming of the opposition between “Alltag” (everyday) and “Feiertag” (holiday), and the integration in the domain of the everyday – which was coeval to the recognition of the latter as a topic worthy of academic attention – of notions such as “lifestyle”/“way of life”, “mentality” and “customs and practices” is traced back to the second half of the XX century. Another perspective which is worth mentioning is that suggested in the entry “Aestheticization of Everyday Life” appeared in the *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture* (2011: 15-18), where the aesthetic quality of

¹ Among the most important ones – although their contents are not strictly related to the goals of this paper – how not to mention also the well-known researches carried out by French semiotic tradition (from Lefebvre, passing through Barthes, Baudrillard, to Lipovetsky) and by the mainly British cultural studies tradition (from Hoggart and Williams, to Storey and Highmore).

² It must be noted, though, that a previous, yet longer and similar articulation of a discourse on the everyday in a German publication was realized by Peter Jehle, who authored the entry “Alltäglich/Alltag” for *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, 1 (2000).

the everyday, in our contemporaneity, is interpreted, with a focus on new technologies, through the lens of aestheticization meant as “the growing significance of aesthetic perception in processes of consumption and consuming” (2011: 15). However, these are cases of theoretical perspectives that do not aim at the articulation of an Everyday Aesthetics, but at an analysis of the everyday that has no intention of *programmatically* developing an aesthetics of the latter.

As already suggested, the succession of the contributions that will be considered is meant to show, so to speak, the typical development from “adolescence” to “adulthood” of a specific field. And a hint of all this is perhaps provided by the growing extension of the *body* of the texts under consideration here.

After the birth and early development phase of Everyday Aesthetics, during which the need to realize a true and proper official survey of it is understandably missing, the beginning of a process of transformation for Everyday Aesthetics in a “young adult” field of study (in which not only there is an attempt to bring the research in specific directions, but one also starts wondering about the various perspectives that are involved and that might arise as more consistent) is inaugurated, we may say, by the first of these more general “explorative” contributions: the entry “Aesthetics of Everyday Life” realized by Sherri Irvin in 2009 for *Blackwell*. It, in fact, presents a compact overview on the evolution of Everyday Aesthetics and on the various positions emerged in it. Irvin’s text is structured around the traditional (and unavoidable) references to Deweyan aesthetics and environmental aesthetics. The first is mentioned since it aimed at the overcoming of the distinction between the fine arts and everyday life, and as such has generated a crucial bifurcation in the definition of the investigation modalities available in Everyday Aesthetics. Environmental aesthetics, on the other hand, is addressed since, according to the author, it has allowed an extension of aesthetic investigations to natural and also to non-natural environments, but more importantly, an extension “[of] the attention to environments, rather than isolated objects, [that] has [therefore] led to the recognition of a mode of aesthetic experience that is complex, immersive, and multisensory, and thus readily applicable to everyday life”. (p. 138)

Irvin’s contribution has a circular structure. It, in fact, outlines the possible objections that may be raised against the essential variety of con-

tents and approaches that connotes Everyday Aesthetics, by bringing the discussion back on the one hand to the question whether Deweyan *criteria* should be accepted or refused, and on the other hand, to the question concerning the effective *models* of aesthetic experience. The latter, the author suggests, should converge in the direction of aesthetically conscious and therefore attentive ways of interacting with our surroundings, hence promoting the pursuit of an aesthetically connoted lifestyle:

even if the texture of everyday life is such as to yield aesthetic satisfactions that are relatively subtle, continual awareness of these satisfactions may offer a payoff in quality of life that is very much worth having. (p. 139)

All in all, what seems to be missing from the undoubtedly clear and solid explanation provided by Irvin, is the development of a position that may open new, fruitful perspectives for Everyday Aesthetics, that at the end of the day is analysed by means of traditional criteria and models.

“Aesthetics of The Everyday”, written by Crispin Sartwell in 2010 for *Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* also presents, in its central and conclusive parts, an overview on the history of Everyday Aesthetics. In this framework, the usual reference to Dewey is followed by an analysis of the phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches to the aesthetic dimension of the everyday. In the final part of the entry, Sartwell addresses “[t]wo *loci classici* of the everyday aesthetics movement in philosophy of art” (p. 768), that is to say two volumes by Scharfstein e Berleant (see: Scharfstein 1988 and Berleant 1991), which, according to him, both contributed to the “crystallization of the movement” in transcultural terms, which the author himself advocates. The academic production of the American scholar is, in fact, strongly focused on the furtherment of an aesthetics that overcomes the paradigms provided by the Modern and narrowing western conception of art. It is also noteworthy that in Sartwell’s stance it is not hard to find ideas that have also been thematized in those studies devoted to the concept of “artification” in its various formulations: on the one hand we can identify the centrality of the dialectics between Modernism and Post-modernism as Ossi Naukkarinen (2012), Nathalie Heinich and Roberta Shapiro (2012) have also done, and on the other hand, we can find references to the well known “making special” theorized by Ellen Dissanayake

(1995). All this, though, fatally characterizes in a predominant way also the entry at issue here, that widely discusses in its introduction (from the definition of the “sources of art” to the “historical relativity of the western conception of fine art”) the centrality of a transcultural approach for Everyday Aesthetics.

The following passage seems to well summarize the author’s stance:

There is an aesthetic dimension to a variety of experiences that are common to nearly all people, but would not normally be seen as experiences of fine art. For example, body adornment is practised by all cultures. [...]

All cultures, as well, practise some arrangement and ornamentation of their immediate environment, in order to create a pleasing effect.[...]

Present-day culture is also saturated with popular arts such as popular music, web design, film, and television animation and drama. People often dedicate much of their lives to such arts, and these arts often present strikingly aesthetic aspects. [...]

Such examples are intended to demonstrate the continuity of the fine and popular arts, of art and craft, and of art and spirituality. In all these ways, the arts are incorporated into and originate within everyday life. [...] (pp. 762-764)

Nevertheless, what seems to make Sartwell’s inquiry not entirely satisfactory for the definition of Everyday Aesthetics as a sub-field of aesthetics is exactly the fact that it is here principally addressed as a methodological problem, which is certainly a necessary aspect to be developed, in order to become more aware of this line of research, but probably not sufficient in order to clarify its statute and consistency from a theoretical point of view.

“New Directions in Aesthetics”, by Paisley Livingston has been first published in 2012 in *Continuum Companion to Aesthetics* (in 2015 *The Bloomsbury Companion to Aesthetics*). This is not an entry specifically designed for Everyday Aesthetics. Nevertheless, the American scholar, facing the difficult challenge of providing a survey about new directions in aesthetics, opts for an overview on Everyday Aesthetics (that he describes as a “trend”

or subfield), of which he thus acknowledges the novelty and fruitfulness, in terms of the consideration of new topics relevant for contemporary aesthetics and the achievement of new intellectual goals (or directions), or also new ways of achieving old goals for the discipline itself.

The contribution, which is indeed extensively articulated and rich in examples, is perhaps one of the first ones realized by scholars previously not well-known in the specific field of Everyday Aesthetics. In fact, it is not surprising that the author, in order to solve some of the questions that “afflict” the best known everyday aestheticians, i.e. the overcoming of the “tension”, which is internal to the sub-discipline, turns to a thinker, who has normally not been involved in debates on Everyday Aesthetics: C.I. Lewis.

Before elaborating this last point more broadly, Livingston deals with the question of the “scope and purpose” of Everyday Aesthetics, by means of an analysis of three aspects that are crucial for it. First, the debate around the criteria for the inclusion of topics in the domain of Everyday Aesthetics depending on their being well-established or not, that brings the author to the adoption of a quite conventional solution: all everyday and familiar phenomena could be a subject matter for Everyday Aesthetics except for those related to fine art and “scenic nature”. The second point concerns *aisthesis* in the pregnant sense of the human ability of perceiving through all the five senses. Against the traditional point of view, that emphasizes the visual dimension, according to Livingston most everyday aestheticians stress the relevance of a synesthetic perception joint with belief and imagination, by denying the priority of pure contemplative vision. According to the author, however, an influential stance such as the continuistic one supported, for instance, by Thomas Leddy, reveals that this contemplative attitude still plays a crucial role in everyday experiences of the aesthetic. The third and fundamental point developed by Livingston is the question about the tension in Everyday Aesthetics. Amongst various interpretations that have been provided as concerns this last aspect, Livingston mentions, as one of the most emblematical, Yuriko Saito’s. The latter summarizes the so-called “tension in Everyday Aesthetics” in a dialectical couple composed of a normative/evaluative moment (awareness of the aestheticity of the everyday) and a descriptive one (faithful representation of everyday experiences). However, we will address this dichotomy

more in detail through the analysis of Saito’s contribution in the next paragraph.

As concerns this third point, Livingston suggests that a way to solve it is to turn to the notion of aesthetic properties.

Assuming that there is a bifurcation in the orientation of our everyday experiences, which is mainly instrumental, but not necessarily non-instrumental, Livingston acknowledges two typologies of experiences in the everyday: 1) those in which means-end rationality prevails: «Instrumental experiences of this type are predominantly anticipatory as far as their evaluative dimension is concerned, as what looms large in our minds is the anticipated risks and payoffs, as well as the plans and actions that are directly related to such “utilities.”(p. 262)»; 2) those in which an intrinsic value prevails, or “in other words, whatever makes the experience positively or negatively valued intrinsically, or for its own sake.” (p. 262) Drawing from these considerations, the author begins his survey on the issue in Lewisian terms. Following the lead of some concepts borrowed from the founding father of conceptual pragmatism, in fact, Livingston maintains that we can consider properly aesthetic experiences those which have a predominantly intrinsic value, without denying, at the same time, the instrumental value that, to a lesser extent, they still possess. It is exactly along these lines that Livingston also retrieves the Lewisian notion of immediate valence of aesthetic experiences, that lies in “the quality of something as presented or presentable” (p. 263), hence in its appearance, implying, in this way, a certain “contemplative regard” (p. 263) that cannot be reduced to mere hedonism and that at the same time does not involve a total absence of awareness.

Livingston adds a further crucial point for this aesthetic perspective inspired by Lewisian philosophy by introducing the so-called «“moralistic” condition»: such condition excludes any hint of possession of property from the realm of aesthetic experiences. He then states that nevertheless the predominant intrinsicity of an item’s aesthetic properties does not exclude at all the presence of relational properties, which may further the appreciation of the item itself and of its ability of triggering aesthetic experiences. This last point is exactly supported by the contextualist ontology, of which Lewis himself was a proponent.

Hoping to have “reduced the tension” between normative and descript-

ive moments that, being an essential characteristic of Everyday Aesthetics, is the main subject of his contribution, Livingston recognizes, however, that major difficulties, for the achievement of all this, still persist. These difficulties can be ascribed, according to the author, to the more fundamental and radical question of “how to live a good life”, that crucially fosters aesthetic investigations, and more generally philosophy. Hence, such question, which is linked to the eventual suspension of “prudential or moral concerns” [in order to] attend primarily to the intrinsic valence” (p. 267) of the items we experience is not likely to be resolved soon.

Livingston’s contribution indeed enriches the range of Everyday Aesthetics’ points of reference with an original link to pragmatism, since it transcends the usual appeals to Deweyan aesthetics. Nevertheless, it seems to be limited to the proposal of a sort of “normalization” of Everyday Aesthetics, by reducing its fundamental motives to crucial elements connoting traditional aesthetics, such as the relationship between aesthetic and ethic, or the dichotomy between description and evaluation. It is exactly for these reasons that in this text it is not easy to identify punctual indications for next steps forward, that would allow the development of those issues that actually constitute the real *fulcrum* of the specific domain of Everyday Aesthetics.

2. Everyday Aesthetics as a Young Adult Sub-discipline

On September 30, 2015, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* published for the first time online the entry “Aesthetics of Everyday Life”, authored by Yuriko Saito, one of the most important figures in the field of Everyday Aesthetics, who also realized a shorter version of the same entry titled “Everyday Aesthetics” in 2014 for the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. As compared to the previous, briefer and so to speak “younger” contributions Saito’s can be considered the richer and more nuanced presentation of Everyday Aesthetics, that has therefore overcome its initial phases. Hence, for these various reasons, her text can be considered emblematical and institutionalizing for Everyday Aesthetics, by symbolizing the official recognition of its “academic dignity”.

By means of a brief overview, the philosopher places Everyday Aesthetics in a line of continuity with the attempts, which were inaugurated in late

XX century, to broaden the domain of Anglo-American aesthetics from a discourse limited to fine arts, to the multi-faceted experiential pattern that takes shape through practices and objects that are pervasive in everyday life.

The author goes on to say that a further feature, which is typical of Everyday Aesthetics, is the effort to release aesthetics from an exclusive focus on beauty and the sublime, by recognizing the richness of a set of aesthetic qualities which, although being less “gratifying” or “impressive” (than beauty and the sublime), still essentially pervade everyone’s quotidian (aesthetic) experience(s).

At the end of the introductory section, Saito stresses that Everyday Aesthetics does not merely have an extensive approach, which tends to include new elements and qualities. She, in fact, also maintains its peculiar theoretical strength, a theoretical strength that is able to make emerge certain issues, which haven’t received and still do not receive adequate attention from “mainstream” aesthetics.

Steering hence the discussion towards what Everyday Aesthetics contents and paradigms are, Saito introduces the debate on what constitutes “everyday” and “aesthetics” in Everyday Aesthetics, which is fundamental in the framework of the apparently unlimited speculative breadth that seems to connote it.

On the one hand the term “everyday” covers a range of activities that can be considered ordinary *stricto sensu* (eating, dwelling, grooming...) or that take place occasionally (holidays, parties, sport, cultural events...). And such inclusivity questions the validity of a literal interpretation of its meaning: everydayness, in fact, is a specific contextual quality, and that which might be completely ordinary for someone, might contrariwise be a rare event for someone else. A strategy that, according to Saito, is able to solve such *impasse*, is to situate quotidianity’s intrinsic characteristics in the attitude we assume towards, and the experience that we have of, everyday objects and activities, rather than attempting to identify them through a mere inventory of the latter.

On the other hand, “aesthetics” has at least two main connotations in the domain of Everyday Aesthetics. It can concern bodily perceptions derived from sensory stimuli or various physical activities, and it can be used either in a honorific or classificatory way. The first (which is preval-

ent both in the discipline *tout court* and in common language) is oriented towards a mainly positive and gratifying conception of aesthetic experiences, the second (which is typical of academic discussions that are outside of philosophical aesthetics in the strict sense, such as aesthetics of manners and political aesthetics), is also open to the consideration of negative factors that may characterize it.

And it is exactly this dualism between honorific and classificatory use that sets the tone of the third and fourth paragraphs of the encyclopedia entry at issue: respectively “Defamiliarization of the Familiar” and “Negative Aesthetics”, from which the author starts an analysis of Everyday Aesthetics that markedly aims to highlight the nexus between aesthetics and ethics. This bond is variously subsumed in formulas such as “immediacy of the aesthetic”, “power of the aesthetic” or “aesthetic life” and plays a central role in the theoretical stance that connotes the author’s whole academic production.

“Defamiliarization of the familiar” refers to the awarding of everyday experiential material with an “auraticity” or “extraordinariness” status, in order to reveal the aesthetic potential eclipsed by its intrinsically ordinary nature. Saito maintains that by embracing such interpretation, that is to say, by over-emphasizing defamiliarization as a precondition for Everyday Aesthetics, it would become impossible to experience and appreciate the ordinary as ordinary.

The author argues that all this takes place either through the recognition of the aesthetic merit of “unimpressive” qualities that provide a quiet calm, comfort, stability and hominess, or through the denial of any aesthetic merit in the monotonous ordinariness connoting everyday life, which is thus referred to by some even as “anaesthetic”.

Saito then claims that if we instead understand aesthetics in a classificatory sense, the acknowledgment of negative aesthetic qualities in the everyday won’t be synonymous with an absence of aesthetic qualities *in toto*, but that will rather corroborate the pervasiveness of an aesthetic texture of and in the ordinary, although negatively.

According to Saito, negative aesthetics is essential for the discourse on Everyday Aesthetics, since it determines its “active” and “activist” dimension, hence contrasting the spectatorial paradigm that, on the other hand, characterizes art-centred aesthetics: when we experience negative

aesthetic qualities, we concretely react, or reflect on how to react, in order to “eliminate, reduce or transform them”, both on a personal and, most importantly, social level.

Such socio-ethical orientation also emerges in the following paragraphs of the entry, especially in those focused on three subfields of Everyday Aesthetics: Ambiance Aesthetics, Social Aesthetics and Action-Oriented Aesthetics – the scepticism towards which is ascribed by the author to western aesthetics’ tendency to consider aesthetically relevant only those experiences that can be shared and objectively evaluated (“judgment-oriented” and “verdict-oriented aesthetics”). Saito states that the overcoming of such limitation – which risks to impoverish the complexity and fruitfulness of the aesthetic and aesthetics – and the understanding of the social, and therefore shareable, origin of the numerous activities and topics covered by Everyday Aesthetics, will finally legitimize the latter. Nevertheless, what appears contradictory in the author’s argumentation, is that she responds to the “intersubjectivist limits” set by western aesthetic tradition, by emphasizing the communal and shareable – hence intersubjective – dimension of Everyday Aesthetics (see also Dowling [2010] and Ratiu [2013]).

After referring briefly to the relationship between art and everyday life, to the typical western attempt to overcome its dichotomous nature, and to the risks involved in the inconsiderate aestheticization, commodification and in-built obsolescence of some elements of the everyday, that can be contrasted only by practices guided by the idea of sustainability and by the consequent adoption of new aesthetic paradigms, the contribution approaches the conclusions.

3. Everyday Aesthetics as a Mature Sub-discipline

It is both undeniable and understandable that the entry at issue does not deal with all aspects of Everyday Aesthetics. Moreover, although Saito strives to provide an impartial and updated contribution, her socio-ethical orientation towards the topic, and her interpretation of the “aesthetic” as an open concept that doesn’t necessarily require an intersubjective engagement are evident.

However, if Everyday Aesthetics wants to become a true and proper

disciplinary field of aesthetics, it necessarily has to deal with a fundamental problem such as that of normativity.

Drawing from these considerations and aiming to address some crucial elements that Saito neglects, I will now briefly compare four essays published between 2010 and 2016 by specifically focusing on two fundamental aspects that they emphasize. The first is the will to systematize Everyday Aesthetics' various methodological approaches – by using a recognizable nomenclature – the second, the necessity for a “normative turn” that would avoid the risk of trivializing the aesthetic, by guaranteeing the possibility to intersubjectively discuss our preferences of taste. Saito, as a matter of fact, almost totally overlooks this recent and extremely relevant critical trend, with the exception of some general hints, that are nevertheless not intentionally referred to it.

Chris Dowling's “The Aesthetics of Daily Life” (2010) paved the way for the development of the foresaid trend: here the author uses a terminology and formulates a “normative-intersubjectivist” proposal that would then be retrieved, shared, partly rectified or further elaborated in three more recent essays. In this programmatic essay, “Weak Formulation” of the aesthetics of everyday life intuition refers to the attempts to define the aesthetic pregnancy of the everyday, by means of an extension of the concept of “aesthetic” usually involved in discussions on artistic value, in order to include typically everyday experiences. On the other hand, “Strong Formulation” of everyday life intuition refers to the attempts to prove how completely ordinary experiences can afford paradigmatic instances of aesthetic experience in a way that is totally unbound from “the limitations and conventions which connote, in the philosophy of art, debates on aesthetic value” (Dowling 2010: 241). Dowling, who aims to reduce the risks of the rather unsatisfying “anything goes”, principally supports a “Weak Formulation” of Everyday Aesthetics, since it generally recognizes and makes more explicit the distinction between judgments which are merely subjective and those which possess a normative aspect. The possibility to preserve the specificity of the aesthetic, and to distinguish it, hence, from judgments based on, or rather entrenched in a purely subjective pleasure stands then, according to the author, in the appropriateness, corrigibility, shareability, in the possibility of consensus or criticism (see Ratiu 2013), or, in other words, in the normative aspect, of a

judgment of taste.

This nomenclature is adopted by Dan Eugen Ratiu in “Remapping the Realm of Aesthetics: on recent controversies about the aesthetic and aesthetic experience in everyday life” (2013) where he identifies a methodological tension between a Weak and Strong Pole of Everyday Aesthetics. He, too, maintains the fruitfulness of a “Weak” stance, and by doing so the author defends a normative but open model of the aesthetic and aesthetic experience, which includes both artistic and everyday life objects and phenomena, and that he places in an analytical framework constituted by three fundamental elements: the self, intersubjectivity and everyday life. These are then further developed in three main theses: 1) There is a normative aspect of the aesthetic experience and judgment which applies to both art and everyday life. Such normativity lies in an intersubjective engagement that would guarantee the non-trivialization of the aesthetic “in everyday mode”; 2) The concept of art must be regarded as an open concept, which nevertheless demands “consistency”, in order to secure a common ground for an aesthetic theory, which would entail both art and everyday life. What is moreover needed, the author claims, is to draw a distinction between the current usages of such open concept, which are oriented towards the elimination of the dichotomy between art and everyday life, and those which are instead typical of modernity, which are focused on the conventional notion of fine arts; 3) Art and Everyday life are both interdependent and interactive “in the continuous flux of experiences of an embodied self”: in other words, to the monadic-isolationist premises of the “Strong Pole”, Ratiu opposes the “Weak-Pole’s” monist ones.

It must be said that the whole recent academic production of the Canadian philosopher Jane Forsey carries out the questions of the methodological approaches to Everyday Aesthetics and that of the relationship between functionality and intersubjectivity in everyday life. In this framework, though, I will only address *The Promise, the Challenge of Everyday Aesthetics* (2014). It focuses on the relationship that exists between designed objects and individuals in everyday life and principally aims to find a “compromise”, or rather, a middle ground between the useful aspects provided by a “Weak Formulation” and those provided by a “Strong Formulation” of Everyday Aesthetics, that the author respectively labels as “Extraordinarist Stance” and “Familiarity Stance”.

In the *pars destruens* of her contribution, Forsey emphasizes a category mistake between artworks and “mere real things” that is made by the advocates of an “Extraordinarist Position”. By maintaining, in fact, that an aesthetic experience can result only from an object that stands out, and catches our attention, in its being unusual – or unfamiliar – from the flux of our ordinary perception, and by arguing that the consequent aesthetic judgment should be formulated following the art-centred traditional model, they confuse the two levels of the discourse and award everyday objects with a meaning, which is, according to the author, unnecessary in order to grasp their aesthetic quality.

In order to overcome such inexactness, Forsey introduces the distinction between aesthetic value, which is potentially everywhere, and artistic value, which is specific to artworks. Such distinction allows the author to begin the *pars costruens* of her discussion. The latter, in fact, on the one hand acknowledges a certain potential shown by the “Familiarity Stance”, which aims to build a theory exclusively based on the aesthetic relevance of the everyday *per se*. On the other hand it also identifies some critical aspects presented by the aforementioned approach, for it, in order to avoid the prescriptions of an art-centred aesthetics, presupposes an aesthetic attentiveness towards anything that provides comfort and security or a sense of belonging, and that, therefore, almost paradoxically, observes Forsey, does not require any specific receptivity from us. In this way, the “Extraordinarist” approach, too, that at least implies the positive recognition of a merit and not the acknowledgment of the latter in its being lacking (aesthetics of the “lacking”), shows a certain degree of fruitfulness.

Elaborating finally a more “balanced” version of Everyday Aesthetics which combines the useful aspects emerged from the analysis of the two methodologies at issue, Forsey formulates a proposal based on two fundamental concepts: that of embeddedness in everyday life and that of functionality. The latter, in particular, appears as indeed conducive in the light of Forsey’s critical standpoint towards the extremes of a Weak and Strong view of Everyday Aesthetics, for not only it replaces the more problematic notion of meaning, but it also seems to guarantee a certain degree of normativity in Everyday Aesthetics through the possibility of in principle sharing with others, and hence to intersubjectively communicate to others, our judgment of taste.

The last text under consideration is Giovanni Matteucci's *The Aesthetic as a Matter of Practices: Form of Life in Everydayness and Art* (2016)³. Here the author develops the debate concerning the two main approaches that constitute Everyday Aesthetics' thematic and methodological *fulcra* by emphasizing, in the nomenclature of his choice, the position they assume towards the established aesthetic theory. To a “Discontinuistic Solution”, which supports the impermeability between a level of analysis that deals with art and another that deals with everyday life, and which the author consequently disagrees with, for it doesn't pursue the resolution of the question of the various forms of aestheticity, and of the ways through which, between them, a certain conflict is generated, is opposed a “Continuistic Solution”, that presents, in its turn, two main options. On the one hand aestheticism, which attempts to transform life itself into a work of art, and that therefore does not contribute to Everyday Aesthetics' aim to make emerge the aesthetic specificity of the everyday as such. On the other hand, an interpretation of art as an intensification of aesthetic elements typically active in everyday life that takes place through, so to speak, “a Copernican revolution of the relationship between the artworld and the everyday” (Matteucci 2016: 13). This second option, the author asserts, seems more fruitful for it makes emerge the distinction between a “hyper-aesthetic” level, with aestheticizing tendencies, and a “hypo-aesthetic” level, with a strong anthropological connotation. This second level of aestheticity appears to afford the opportunity to identify some sort of normative aspect that would avoid the risk of “lassism” that is inherent in the “tendency to include” which often seems to connote Everyday Aesthetics, due to its “allergy” to every form of traditional or “mainstream” prescriptivism. To such normativity of the aesthetic, Matteucci says, would hence correspond the possibility of intersubjective dialogue about the acts through which we show our taste preferences, which are aesthetic “to the extent that they are bound to appearance and not the true and proper epistemic construction” (Matteucci 2016: 23), and have a peculiar character because the criterion that determines them is not easily identifiable, yet, it does not exclude attempts to justify, both rationally, expressively and

³ This essay is the latest elaboration of two previous papers (see: Matteucci 2013, 2015), which already contained the main issues stressed here.

actively its validity.

All in all, the four mentioned authors, by means of a systematization of Everyday Aesthetics’ methodological approaches aim to make emerge the tension, or conflict, between them and hence to identify a normative aspect within such a topical discourse for contemporary aesthetics. All this also in order to avoid the risk of making Everyday Aesthetics a default theoretical venue with no specific conceptual rigor, which merely includes all those perceptually relevant objects and activities that mainstream aesthetics has hitherto overlooked.

It is evident how in this critical framework intersubjectivity plays a key role for the definition of a consistent analysis of the aesthetic, which both pertains art and the everyday (most of the authors, in fact, tend to agree with a Continuistic option of Everyday Aesthetics) and seems to have an anthropological connotation.

What is noteworthy here is that each author reaches such conclusion from different perspectives and backgrounds proving that the intersubjectivist solution can eventually guarantee a certain degree of normativity.

Aim of this paper was therefore to address the relevance of such critical trend that is emerging in the field of Everyday Aesthetics, and to show how, while the latter is finally undergoing a process of academic institutionalization, it is still needed to address and make Everyday Aesthetics’ core concepts intelligible, as well as to pursue the search for a common theoretical ground on which to build its critical assessment. The fact that in this new stage of maturity different perspectives converge towards the indication of a normative turn, which is able to overcome initial and basic methodological and theoretical dichotomies, suggests that it is exactly in this horizon that this by now “adult” sub-discipline will have to take its next steps in order to prove its significant theoretical potential.⁴

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⁴ I am deeply grateful to Giovanni Matteucci for his suggestions on the final version of the paper.

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