

Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Volume 14, 2022

Edited by Vítor Moura and Connell Vaughan



Published by



European
Society for
Aesthetics

Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Founded in 2009 by Fabian Dorsch

Internet: <http://proceedings.eurosa.org>

Email: proceedings@eurosa.org

ISSN: 1664 – 5278

Editors

Connell Vaughan (Technological University Dublin)

Vítor Moura (University of Minho, Guimarães)

Editorial Board

Adam Andrzejewski (University of Warsaw)

Claire Anscomb (De Montfort University)

María José Alcaraz León (University of Murcia)

Pauline von Bonsdorff (University of Jyväskylä)

Tereza Hadravová (Charles University, Prague)

Regina-Nino Mion (Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn)

Jochen Schuff (Free University of Berlin)

Elena Tavani (University of Naples)

Iris Vidmar Jovanović (University of Rijeka)

Publisher

The European Society for Aesthetics



Department of Philosophy

University of Fribourg

Avenue de l'Europe 20

1700 Fribourg

Switzerland

Internet: <http://www.eurosa.org>

Email: secretary@eurosa.org

Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Volume 14, 2022

Edited by Vítor Moura and Connell Vaughan

Table of Contents

Hassan Ali <i>Rosebud: Exploring Deleuzian Temporality through the Wellesian Shot</i>	1
Sacha Behrend <i>On the Apparent Incompatibility of Perceptual and Conventional Accounts of Pictures</i>	14
Anu Besson <i>On Aesthetic Practices and Cultural Identity of Finish Emigrants</i>	28
Pol Capdevila <i>Mood in Cinema. Towards a Unified Form of Time</i>	38
Jokob Deibl <i>From Infinite Rapprochement to the Open: From Kant to Hölderlin</i>	56
Viviana Galletta <i>The Laocoön and the Devil: A Path through the Franciscus Hemsterhuis' Letter on Sculpture</i>	68
Lorenzo Gineprini <i>The Uncanniness of the Ordinary: Rethinking the Uncanny within Aesthetics</i>	86
Jason Holt <i>Self-Referential Aesthetics in the Art of Leonard Cohen</i>	100
Mariliis Elizabeth Holzmann <i>An Alien Phenomenology of Object Oriented Aesthetics and Genderqueer Representations in Julia Ducournau's Titane (2021)</i>	112

Daniel Kuran <i>From Ethics to Aesthetics: On an Aesthetic Sense in Kant's Philosophy of Religion</i>	128
Salvador Rubio Marco <i>Can Poems do Philosophy?: the Philosopher as a Sportsman of the Mind</i>	141
Philip Mills <i>Wanting Austin Inside Out: Viral Poetics and Queer Theory</i>	151
Eva Schürmann <i>"A Real Fact is a Fact of Aesthetic Experience." On the Actuality of Whitehead's Aesthetics</i>	166
Thomas Symeonidis <i>Designing Worlds: Explorations of the Possible Structures of the Aesthetic in Jacques Rancière</i>	183
Asmus Trautsch <i>Transformation and Transcendence of the Tragic: Milo Rau's "Theatre of the Real"</i>	194
Elettra Villani <i>The Category of the Aesthetic: Considerations on Theodor W. Adorno's Reading of Kierkegaard</i>	218

On Aesthetic Practices and Cultural Identity of Finnish Emigrants

Anu Besson⁴

University of Jyväskylä, Finland

ABSTRACT. The aesthetic life of an emigrant often undergoes a transformation following the relocation - sometimes it is a struggle, sometimes an expansion. This transformation, including changes or adaptations of daily, seasonal or annual rhythms; and growth or evolution in one's aesthetic practices, taste, and sense of cultural identity, are a fruitful focus of research.

Aesthetic practices is an emerging concept that captures habitual activities that people do for aesthetic enjoyment as part of their everyday. In this article I will focus on aesthetic practices within the sphere of home; however, the concept in itself should not be limited to the act of residing or undertaking household chores. Aesthetic practices as activities may aim for an output, such as a tidied house or a prepared meal, but are undertaken equally for the aesthetic satisfaction they bring to the enactor. The focus is on the attitude, mindset or expectation: we can clean the house or repair a fence because their untidy appearances make us feel frustrated or embarrassed. Or, we can draw aesthetic enjoyment from the process and outcome of restoring and creating.

In my ongoing research project, I focus on aesthetic practices of contemporary Finnish emigrants regarding the home, such as interior decoration, seasonal decorations, tidying, gardening and cooking. My particular target groups are Finns in Australia and Canada as these are traditionally popular relocation countries of Finns since the 1800s. Both countries have a stable multi-thousand population of Finnish- and English-speaking Finnish (ancestry) emigrants. The purpose of my project is to examine the nature and subjective value/importance of aesthetic practices, expressed through or embedded in one's hobbies, habits and pastimes,

⁴ Email: anu.m.besson@jyu.fi

that one engages in at home for aesthetic enjoyment.

But, what does the concept of aesthetic practices add to the field of aesthetics? Why introduce new terminology, instead of simply discussing artistic pursuits or creative pastimes? During the past decade or so, the scope of aesthetics has already meritoriously evolved to reclaim the aesthetic, ethical and philosophical value of everyday items and activities (Saito, 2022); acknowledged how everyday aesthetics maintain or improve subjective wellbeing (Melchionne, 2014); and expanded our understanding of art from object arts to process arts (Nguyen, 2020).

Aligning with Pauline von Bonsdorff (2022a, 2022b), I suggest that the significance of aesthetic practices as a concept lies in the theme of good life. In this paper, a good life is understood as a way of life that supports the development of ‘authentic self’, or the experienced coherence and integrity or wholeness of self-identity (Tallis, 2021, pp. 26, 167, 271) and which goes beyond the general value of having meaningful pastime activities.

Aesthetic practices are about the meaning and effect of action in human life as they emphasize interactivity (creation, reception, modulation and variation over time), development of skill and style, and the will to share and reflect experiences and achievements with others. Aesthetic practices as a concept underlines the significance of aesthetic activities as long-term and shared practices, which emerge and evolve as a part of culture, often form subcultures, and affect the formation of selfhood and lifeworld (Bonsdorff, 2022b).



Figure1.

Figure 1. For emigrants, cultural traditions and personal aesthetic practices may become more markedly an intentional individual choice, sometimes referred to as 'migrant aesthetics' by the host culture. Traditional

Finnish easter decorations.

1. Cultural traditions and aesthetic practices

Why study aesthetic practices of emigrants? Often, when a person relocates to a new country and culture, one has to leave behind a cloak of cultural practices, including traditions, conventions and cultural aesthetics. Such practices in turn have often served as a fertile ground for or a protective shield to one's personal aesthetic practices - habitual ways of doing things for aesthetic enjoyment.

This does not mean that an emigrant must give up cultural or personal aesthetic practices and activities, but such practices become more markedly an individual choice or a part of subculture, sometimes called migrant aesthetics or migrant architecture. Upholding traditions, cultural practices, as well as personal aesthetic practices, may become more intentional and deliberate, or at times, challenging and difficult.

In our team research project called 'Aesthetic Practices in the Transformation of the Self and the World' we understand aesthetic practices to cover a variety of preoccupations from professional art making to regularly performed everyday activities. Aesthetic practices also capture activities that have an instrumental goal, such as the mentioned tidying, repairing or gardening where the attitude is aesthetic, or the activity is aesthetically motivated and brings aesthetic enjoyment.

It is important to note the difference between cultural aesthetics or cultural practices, which are collective and to some degree normative, and aesthetic practices, which are personal, although they too can be shared and collectively influenced. These often overlap and intertwine, but are not synonymous. In a new country, one's habitual and familiar ways of doing things may become seen as a mark of minority, at times met with apprehension or even hostility. This may become a time of turmoil for a migrant who may feel that one's identity and self-expression are under scrutiny or actively denied.

What separates aesthetic practices from cultural traditions is that with aesthetic practices the enactor often, although not always, creates the framework - such as habits, patterns, plans or simply an idea - and then, simultaneously or consequently executes the aesthetically rewarding action that 'fulfils' the purpose of the framework. C. Thi Nguyen states regarding process arts and I concur regarding aesthetic practices:

The arts of action... are marked by distinctively self-reflective aesthetic appreciation. In these arts, the focus of the appreciator's aesthetic attention is on the aesthetic qualities of their own actions. (Nguyen, 2020, p. 2)

2. Gardening on the 'wrong continent'

Let us examine, as an example of an aesthetic practice, gardening and yard work. Gardening practices and preferences of different cultural or ethnic groups in Australia have been studied before, although this previous research does not include Finns. Many migrants have found settling in Australia both difficult and rewarding, due to the fact that compared to the Northern Hemisphere, the seasons and climate are 'the opposite'. Earlier findings indicate that people with English background in Australia prefer to grow flowering plants in the tradition of English gardens, whereas people of Southeast Asian or Mediterranean origin prefer to grow edible produce, plants and herbs that might be otherwise difficult or costly to obtain (Muir & Hampel, 2004, Armstrong, 2022).

Despite its relatively inhospitable farming climate, Finland has a strong tradition of kitchen gardens. During the short summer season, people love to grow edible plants and herbs, in particular root and vine vegetables, berries such as gooseberries, redcurrants and blackcurrants, and fruits including apples. However, many of these plants have adapted to and only thrive in cooler and rainier climates, being the opposite of conditions in Australia. How do Finns in Australia 'solve' this problem potentially hampering their gardening?

Based on my observations and generally speaking, Finns in Australia are less focused on growing edibles and more interested in other types of uses of the yard. Some important elements for Finns tend to be a sauna, a smoke oven, and to a lesser degree, a carpet rack. Sauna is perhaps the best-known of these Finnish traditions. A smoke oven is a small barrel where fish or meat is smoke-cooked and a carpet rack is a metal stand for dust-beating rugs. Thus, the importance of the yard is less in food production and more in other ways to 'properly run' one's household to live a life that feels familiar.

Both Pauline von Bonsdorff (2022a, 2022b) and Yuriko Saito (2022) have recently written about how household chores, such as tidying, repairing and gardening have an integral role in everyday aesthetics and in fact, are existential in nature. According to Bonsdorff,

creating order in the home through cleaning and tidying can be a significant source of pleasure, not just because of the calming after-effect of enjoying an organised space, but due to the process and practice itself: for someone who enjoys tidying, the act becomes a form of self-expression and is about adding and modifying through repetition and variation, instead of simply decluttering or removing.

Saito in turn talks about ethical dimensions of everyday aesthetic activities, where we show care towards ourselves, others and objects through domestic duties. Saito notes the intersubjective nature of household chores where we can relate to not just our contemporaries but to past generations and faraway cultures through the appreciation of the essential nature of the experience: preparing a meal, tidying a house, repairing a sock or tending to a garden are not just toil and drudgery, but can also be an expression of care and beauty. Due to this intersubjectivity one might assume that household chores do not vary greatly across countries and cultures; yet, they are always interwoven with not just cultural aesthetics and traditions but also with personal style, preferences and aesthetic practices.

2.1. Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*

Drawing from Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958), it is interesting to examine the abovementioned elements – sauna, smoke oven and carpet rack - as enablers of aesthetic practices through the lenses of labour, or sustaining basic life processes; work, or making things and tools to ease labour; and action, or connecting with others verbally and symbolically to affect the society and culture by establishing oneself as a person of (some degree of) influence in the world.

Firstly, to provide more context, according to Arendt, 'labour' captures physically draining or dull repetitive drudgery to meet immediate needs for one's own or species' survival; 'work', covers creativity and crafting of tools to ease labour to make life more worthwhile; and 'action' is about establishing oneself as an individual with identity, agency, will and voice about and for society (1958, pp. xv-xvi). Arendt's discussion is commentary and criticism of classic texts by John Locke, Adam Smith and Karl Marx and hence, mostly refer to the societies of antiquity, medieval times and early industrialisation. Here it is important to note that in this presentation I do not delve deeply in Arendt's categorisation or the criticism it has received. Rather, I use her framework to illustrate how a seemingly mundane everyday activity can

occupy multiple positions or layers of meaning.

2.2 Sauna, socially meaningful marker of identity

Firstly, looking at the example of a sauna, it can be labelled as labour, because bathing exists to sustain one's basic biological processes through hygiene and relaxation. However, for a Finnish emigrant, constructing a sauna in one's yard is not about hygiene, for every modern house has a shower; a sauna is far more than that. If we look at Arendt's definition of work, sauna is used as a tool to achieve an instrumental goal of cleanliness, but more importantly sauna exists for undertaking a beloved cultural and aesthetic practice that involves a sequence of activities to achieve invigorated calmness and peace of mind and body. Furthermore, under Arendt's term of action, a sauna at an emigrant Finn's yard is a socially meaningful marker of identity: it flags one as a foreigner yet proud of one's roots, and it transfers a sense of 'how to be a Finn' to one's offspring. Thus, sauna is not just a tool for but a symbol of ongoing cultural identity and aesthetic practice.

2.3 Smoke oven and carpet rack as action towards authenticity

These same observations apply to the smoke oven and carpet rack. A smoke oven is not really needed today with modern ovens and readymade meals. However, the goal of smoke-cooking is to enhance flavour and the process itself is often tied to positive sensations, memories and symbolism. A carpet rack, although not as common to have as a sauna or a smoke oven, is important to some Finnish emigrants for 'proper cleanliness': the instrumental goal is a dust-free home, but the process of achieving it differs from the standard modern way of vacuuming.

Again, labour is undertaken for cleanliness, yet the carpet rack is a tool for achieving the 'proper' or 'authentic' cleanliness: many like the fresh scent that the aired rugs bring indoors and some older generation Finns, including my parents, attest that the home is not fully cleaned until the rugs have been beaten. Reflecting on Arendt, the smoke oven and carpet rack enable 'proper' or 'authentic' housekeeping in a new homeland, a particular, familiar and aesthetically pleasing way of residing and being in the world that is simultaneously action, an attempt or wish to stake one's claim as an individual with a particular taste and preferences within a host nation of culturally different customs.

Aesthetic practices in the home often link to or stem from reproductive labour. Thus, it appears that focusing on aesthetic practices is not just about different perspective, but it as a concept can bind together different classes of activities - labour, work and action - to be interpreted or experienced in a more interlaced or diffused manner.

3. Temporality and aesthetic practices of migrants

Another important aspect relating to many aesthetic practices of emigrants is temporality, which can be examined from at least the following three angles:

Firstly, emigrants often draw from their childhood, or real or imagined past and nostalgia, in establishing aesthetic practices. A common, oft-shared understanding among Finns in Australia is that how things were done in their past is the original, true or the authentic way. Secondly, an aesthetic practice can evolve over time, either change in substance or in importance. Something that used to be very important in a different environment, life stage and culture may lose its status, or vice versa. Thirdly, aesthetic practices often carry an expectation for the future. For example, the enactor wishes to pass on a personally meaningful aesthetic practice, or at least memories of it, to one's children. Hence, the rhythms associated with aesthetic practices can be quite short, such as daily repetition, or very long, such as slow evolution or development over decades.

Recently I visited my friend Krista, a fellow Finnish-Australian who is a marine biology researcher and a mother of three young kids. We shared lunch, a homemade Finnish-style macaroni bake, had strong coffee and watched - and refereed - our children's play. When the kids got too rowdy, Krista directed everyone outside to a cumquat tree and promised the kids could pick all the fruit they could reach. This fun activity kept the offspring entertained for a good half an hour. Krista remarked, 'it's almost like having a real Finnish berry bush', despite the tree being exotically tropical from our perspective and the fruit nearly too tart for our palates. We discussed how the activity of picking and eating is what's important: the joy and sense of foraging, finding food from the wild, or growing your own, and eating it fresh from the bush. 'These Finnish style activities make me feel more Finnish and help transfer that identity to kids as well', Krista concluded.

Cumquats are not gooseberries or blackcurrants that we would normally pick in Finland. It is the act, the process, the sense of keeping a precious habit alive and experiencing

something aesthetically rewarding, that appears to matter the most.

What many emigrants appear to miss the most from their country of origin - in addition to family and friends - usually relate to the familiar everyday aesthetics and previously commonplace aesthetic practices. Many of us have met a person who laments the wrong flavours in the new country's cuisine, the wrong meal rhythm of the day, or how certain ingredients or items are not readily available in stores. Or, how the seasons change in the wrong order or seemingly do not change at all; an exotic lack of rhythm that many find exhilarating at first, but may grow weary of over time. Another Finnish-Australian friend of mine recently observed how the Australian seasons - six distinctive periods to the Aboriginals, one long summer with a rainy season in the middle for Finns - can never feel familiar to her. At times, the removal of the cultural cloak is so perpetually disruptive that the emigrant decides to abandon the venture and return to the original homeland.⁵

4. Concluding comments

I conclude by noting the previous relevant discussion by Pauline von Bonsdorff, Yuriko Saito, C. Thi Nguyen, Kevin Melchionne and artist Jenny Odell (see the reference list) who all argue from slightly different viewpoints, and through different terminology, that cultivation of everyday aesthetic sensibility and everyday aesthetic practices are essential for our individual and shared wellbeing and world-making. The hallmark of aesthetic practices is that *how* we do things matters as much, if not more, than the result.

The recurring themes underlying the aesthetic practices of the home, that I have identified in the accounts of Finns living in Australia, are agency, authenticity and aesthetics, which as a combination contribute to the formation of not just the sense of home, but one's identity and place in the life-world. A crucial element of aesthetics of homeliness is rhythm. At home we are able to follow our natural circadian rhythms, but also personal and cultural rhythms such as active and idle times, meal times, and signposts or milestones in time including seasonal celebrations. Research in residential architecture and design often focuses on the typology or physical elements of the dwelling, including the layout, materials, colours and

⁵ These matters are regularly discussed for example in the *Australian Suomalaiset [Finns in Australia]* Facebook group of 9000 members.

functionalities. But what truly makes a home are the activities the home affords us.

References

- Arendt, Hannah (1958), *The Human Condition*, USA: Chicago University Press.
- Armstrong, Helen (2018), "Migration Landscape", in: *Culture of Landscape*, <https://reflectionsonlandscape.com/>
- Bonsdorff, Pauline von (forthcoming in 2022), "Aesthetic practices", in: Valery Vinogradovs (ed.), *Aesthetic Literacy. A Book for Everyone*.
- Bonsdorff, Pauline von (2022), "Aesthetic Practices in the Transformation of Self and World", University of Jyväskylä, <https://www.jyu.fi/hytk/fi/laitokset/mutku/tutkimus/tutkimusprojektit/aestheticpractices>.
- Head, Lesley; Muir, Pat & Hampel, Eva (2004), 'Australian Backyard Gardens and the Journey of Migration', *Geographical Review*, vol. 94 (3), pp. 326-347.
- Melchionne, Kevin (2014), 'The Point of Everyday Aesthetics', *Contemporary Aesthetics*, vol 12.
- Nguyen, C. Thi (2020), 'The arts of action', *Philosopher's Imprint*, vol. 20 (14), pp. 1-27.
- Odell, Jenny (2019), *How To Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*, Australia: Black Inc.
- Saito, Yuriko (2022), *Aesthetics of Care: Practice in Everyday Life*, Ebook: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Tallis, Frank (2021), *The Act of Living*, Great Britain: Little, Brown.