

# Cultivating Aesthetic Sensibility for Sustainability

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Our aesthetic practices, by which we aim for better well-being, are intertwined with fostering sustainability. This article focuses on Yuriko Saito's aesthetics of sustainability, an idea denoting a new kind of aesthetic sensibility informed by and featuring both environmental and cultural sustainability. Saito's idea is based on our aesthetic relationship with everyday experiences. In this article, I defend the idea, on the one hand, by considering the immanence of change as a sense of contemporary everydayness and, on the other hand, by regarding mindfulness as a practice. Situating the discussion in the European context emphasises the aesthetics of sustainability as a sustainability transformation, that is, an ongoing societal change powered by the continuous cultivation of aesthetic sensibility. | Keywords: *Cultivation, Aesthetic Sensibility, Everyday Activities, Mindfulness, Sustainability Transformation*

## 1. Introduction

In 2019, the European Environment Agency (2019, p. 10) stated that Europe “[...] continues to consume more resources and contribute more to environmental degradation than many other world regions.” Regarding this, our aesthetic practices – by which we aim for better well-being in Europe – do not remain untouched, for they are, through their entanglement in producing environmental harm, also challenged by sustainability goals.<sup>1</sup> In Europe, such goals are tied up with the European Green Deal, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the European Union by fifty-five per cent by 2030, compared to 1990 levels (europa.eu, 2021). Transforming production and consumption to hit this target means that not only global and local environmental crises but also their mitigation shape European lived environments, societies, and everyday lives. Considering this situation, what might it be like to cultivate aesthetic sensibility, to use and develop human aesthetic capability?

<sup>1</sup> It suffices to think, for example, how significant air travel is for the contemporary art world – or the sports world, for that matter.

In this article, I focus on Yuriko Saito's (2017) *aesthetics of sustainability*, an idea denoting a new kind of aesthetic sensibility informed by and featuring both environmental and cultural sustainability. The idea deepens Saito's (2007) earlier discussion on *green aesthetics* by approaching citizens as active proponents of forming a socially shared aesthetic sensibility. With this impetus, Saito builds on John Dewey's (1958) pragmatist account of aesthetic experience, which disagrees with separating everyday life from the aesthetic domain and grounds the aesthetic in the interconnectedness of an individual and her environment. The view also motivates my action-oriented discussion: the changing environment significantly influences how we live our daily lives, but what global environmental change and its numerous aspects elucidate is that the vice versa is also true.

The nation's state is famously discussed in relation to people's aesthetic capacities already in Plato's *Republic* and Friedrich Schiller's letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (2013/1794), which both rightly underline the significance of artistic activities for daily life. Saito (2017, p. 226) affirms that the arts are "[...] the best means available for sharpening our aesthetic sensibility." Yet, Saito (2017, p. 4) reminds us, "It is vital that we remain cognizant of the fact that everyday aesthetics determines the quality of society, and ultimately the state of the world, for better or worse." Saito thus elaborates the aesthetics of sustainability within the philosophical aesthetics' subdiscipline of everyday aesthetics and, by emphasising an action-oriented perspective, offers the idea, for example, for taming over-consumption and establishing more sustainable human-nature relationships. I argue that the aesthetics of sustainability manifests as a sustainability transformation, that is, as an ongoing societal change powered by the continuous cultivation of aesthetic sensibility, especially in the contemporary European context.

By considering the aesthetics of sustainability in the European context, I do not wish to undermine its relevance in other socio-geographic contexts. Saito elaborates her idea in the North American context and develops her discussion by weaving into it the cultivation of insights of Japanese aesthetic sensibility. However, I do think that considering the aesthetics of sustainability is especially relevant in the context of urban Europe, where the general rhetoric underlines bold action towards achieving sustainability.

I start in Section 2 by discussing aesthetic sensibility's relevancy to sustainable development. In Section 3, I examine how the aesthetics of sustainability is related to the various approaches to discuss the role of cultivating aesthetic sensibility in achieving sustainability goals. In the European – and, broadly speaking, Western – context, Saito's aesthetics of sustainability seems to possess a special role bound to our experiences in everyday life. I then continue in Section 4 by contemplating the contemporary everydayness in countries that strive for sustainability. I draw on my experience of living in urban Finland to affirm that our everyday aesthetic sensibility is also developed through experiences that stand out in our everyday lives. Nonetheless, in Section 5 I argue that Saito finds mindfulness central to developing an environmentally more sustainable aesthetic sensibility. By regarding mindfulness as a practice,

I defend the claim that everyday activities cultivate aesthetic sensibility, a view which I confirm in Section 6, before a brief conclusion, by apprehending the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility as an everyday activity.

## 2. Cultivating Transformations?

The cultivation of aesthetic sensibility is not a common issue in discussions concerning sustainability transformations.<sup>2</sup> By sustainability transformations, I mean “[...] fundamental changes in societies paving their way towards sustainable well-being of nature and humans” (helsinki-institute-of-sustainability-science, 2021). Conceptually, sustainability transformations are bound to sustainable development, which was defined as an intergenerational question in the United Nations’ Brundtland Report in 1987. Regarding societal systems, colloquial, scientific, and political discussions concerning sustainability transformations tend to revolve around such practical issues as food, energy, and mobility. I understand sustainability transformations as locally experienced situations where meaning-making is coloured by complex and systemic spatial and temporal relations. As such, sustainability transformations are situations of value conflicts and demand the development of skills, for example, in practising reflection (Soininen et al., 2021). Hence, I find relevance in aesthetic sensibility, which as an expression seems to denote, as Elisabeth Schellekens (2009, pp. 739–740) explains, the realm of subjective experiences, emotions, sensations, and aesthetic taste.

Aesthetic sensibility is an ambiguous concept of philosophical aesthetics.<sup>3</sup> Saito does not define the concept in elaborating the aesthetics of sustainability but connects aesthetic sensibility to “overcoming our normal attitudes,” implying thus the skill-like nature of aesthetic sensibility (Saito, 2017, pp. 17–18). However, Saito builds on the same Deweyan basis as Arnold Berleant (2015a), who regards aesthetic sensibility as a “culturally bound sense perception” that is profoundly woven into being human. Following Berleant, aesthetic sensibility is a fundamental factor in aesthetic experiences and appreciation, which again provide sources for developing our aesthetic sensibility. Based on this, aesthetic sensibility has a systemic nature: it emerges in the interconnectedness of individuals, their environment, society, and culture.

When thinking about sustainability transformations as situations of value conflicts and aesthetic sensibility as an emergent feature of (human) existence, it could be useful to conceive of aesthetic sensibility in line with John Bender (2001), who suggests:

[...] that we think of sensibilities as dispositions or propensities to identify certain features, properties, or relations of a work as being aesthetically significant, i.e., as either being value-making or value-

<sup>2</sup> To give an idea, on 29 June 2021, Google Scholar gave three results for “sustainability transformation” and “aesthetic sensibility” together, whereas on 29 April 2021, it gave 16,400 results for “sustainability science,” 230 results for “aesthetic sensibility” and “sustainability” together, and 29 results for the combination “aesthetic sensibility + sustainability science.”

<sup>3</sup> About the concept and its history, see, e.g., Sibley (1959), Schellekens (2009), Vermeir and Deckard (2012).

lowering. Differences in sensibility are disagreements about where the aesthetic value of an artwork lies; differences in refinement of sensibilities are differences in ability to identify various properties and relations as sources of value; changes in sensibility are alterations in our propensities to see certain properties and relations as value-making or value-lowering. (Bender, 2001, p. 74)

Defining aesthetic sensibility as a propensity to identify aesthetic value is in line with our embeddedness in the cultures we breathe. At the same time, the definition opens the question of what effectively influences such propensities.

Works of art provide the context for Bender's discussion, and often they are considered *the* field that cultivates our aesthetic sensibility. Although my view is congenial to Saito's view that we can appropriately discuss aesthetic sensibility also in relation to other fields of experience, in discussing the aesthetics of sustainability it becomes a challenge to explain how environmental sustainability can influence our propensities to identify aesthetic value. Answering this problematic question, Saito (2017, p. 105) considers the aesthetics of sustainability as a societal movement, depending on growing ecological literacy in societies. My account develops Saito's discussion by contemplating how the idea of sustainability transformation assists in apprehending the contemporary use and development of aesthetic sensibility, that is, its cultivation.

For Saito, cultivation means especially the guidance and education of non-professionals in aesthetic literacy, a view motivated by the belief that our aesthetic sensibilities change both without and with our consent. Saito (2017, p. 198) holds that with the current *laissez-faire* attitude in aesthetic matters, we support the distortion of sensibility for the sake of profit without our informed consent – “the co-optation of sensibility” – as discussed by Berleant (2015b). From the perspective of human action, influencing our propensities to identify aesthetic value is a part of transforming practices through which our aesthetic capacities influence not only individuals but also their environment, economic systems, society, and culture. Cultures change through cultivation, as gardeners and educators exemplify through their practice. Indeed, culture and cultivation are interconnected phenomena, as the words' shared etymological roots in Latin *colere* ('to cultivate, to inhabit') and *cultus* ('care, labour, cultivation') imply.<sup>4</sup> Next, I examine three approaches to discuss the role of cultivating aesthetic sensibility in achieving sustainability goals.

### 3. Three Approaches to Sustainability Transformations

The recent discussion in philosophical aesthetics offers some initial clarification about the role of cultivating aesthetic sensibility in fostering sustainability transformations. At least three converging approaches to the matter can be distinguished. These approaches are: 1) to discuss how the

<sup>4</sup> See *cultivate* in the Oxford Dictionary of English and the Online Etymology Dictionary, which gives the hypothetical origin of the word 'cultivation' in the Proto-Indo-European root 'kwel-', meaning "revolve, move round; sojourn, dwell." The mass media theory and socialisation perspective (e.g., Potter, 2014) and, e.g., Critical Theory, have repeatedly pointed to the connection between culture and cultivation.

category of the aesthetic broadens our understanding of sustainability, 2) to show how aesthetic capacities assist in driving substantial environmental and cultural changes, and 3) to provide aesthetically informed conceptual guidance for changing practices. The aesthetics of sustainability represents especially the latter approach, as I show by providing an overview of the three approaches in the following.

### 3.1 Aesthetic Sustainability

Sustainability transformations are usually discussed concerning environmental, economic, social, and cultural domains. These four domains are critically challenged by the aesthetic domain through the proposed concept of aesthetic sustainability, which primarily concerns the perceptible and experienced reality (Lehtinen, 2021). As such, aesthetic sustainability has to do with – but is not limited by – the individual dimension of sustainability. By embracing a reflective approach to individual experiences through time, aesthetic sustainability provides a lens to discuss the mentioned sustainability dimensions in particular instances. For example, regarding cultural heritage sites, an aesthetics advocate may seem destined to “weak sustainability,” an approach in which ecological sustainability is considered negotiable with other values, such as cultural sustainability (see, e.g., Brady, 2014; Haapala, 2020). However, through aesthetic sustainability we can think of other cases, for example, national parks, in which case an aesthetics advocate could perhaps support strong sustainability and, by arguing for aesthetic sustainability, also argue for ecological sustainability.

From the perspective of critics, aesthetic sustainability is an important conceptual tool for the new kind of aesthetic sensibility. Aesthetic sustainability applies to those elements in the aesthetic domain that sustain changes (Lehtinen, 2021). In this sense, sustainability is not a novelty in the discussion of aesthetics but instead echoes the idea of cultural classics and “the test of time.” As a concept, aesthetic sustainability invites us to deepen especially our temporal sensitivity, for which intergenerational thinking is relevant (Capdevila-Werning & Lehtinen, 2021). However, because the aesthetics of sustainability is both informed and featured by environmental and cultural sustainability, it favours aesthetic sustainability only when that would amount to achieving overall sustainability, a state described, for example, in the United Nations’ seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (sdgs.un, 2021). Sustainability goals of various kinds are thus thought to influence peoples’ propensities to identify aesthetic value, their aesthetic sensibility, in the aesthetics of sustainability. Nevertheless, Sanna Lehtinen (2021) seeks to point out with the concept of aesthetic sustainability that aesthetic values are also subject to change and that we are already witnessing such a paradigm shift in aesthetics, through which ecological sustainability may come to count more in aesthetic appreciation in the future (see also Saito, 2017, p. 209).

### 3.2 Resilience

Whereas the first approach attempts to offer a voice for mitigating global environmental change, the second approach targets human adaptation to the change. Recently, several aesthetics researchers have argued that, for example, artistic skills, aesthetic imagination, sensitivity, and appreciation contribute to building resilience – a capacity to positively manage changes (Irvin, 2008; Kagan, 2011; Saito, 2017; Nomikos, 2018; Afffi, 2020; Mikkonen, 2021). Through supporting human well-being and thus opportunities to participate in sustainable development, cultivating aesthetic sensibility manifests as a promise of sustainability transformations. Ramsey Afffi (2020) even provocatively holds that cultivating aesthetic sensibility should be placed in the core of curricula because becoming more sensitive to encountering especially vulnerable beauty and to act beautifully builds one’s resilience through making impossible the negation of one’s role in the climate crises.

Afffi follows the seminal view in aesthetics formulated by Alexander Baumgarten, who discussed both the experience of beauty and the activity of striving for beauty as parts of one’s aesthetic capability (Kuisma, Lehtinen, and Mäcklin, 2019). Afffi (2020, p. 10) argues that “[a]esthetic recalibration is not a continuous process because I only ever catch up with myself in moments of imperfect realisation.” Contrastingly, often in everyday aesthetics, the cultivation of aesthetic capacities is located in the flow of our lives. For example, Ariane Nomikos (2018) suggests that becoming more sensitive to everyday places and activities aids in gaining aesthetic consolation and thus helps to maintain well-being amid changing environments. Teaching and learning to enjoy what is present is also emphasised by Saito (2017, pp. 18–19) and Sherri Irvin (2008, pp. 41–42), who think that this way of cultivating everyday aesthetic sensibility could tame overconsumption, as well as despair in those situations that individuals cannot change.

The aesthetics of sustainability as a new kind of aesthetic sensibility, that is, a propensity to identify aesthetic value in a way that is both environmentally and culturally sustainable, suggests resilience, especially in the case of individuals. Increased capacities to experience complexity and uncertainty are closely related to such aesthetics, as Sacha Kagan (2011) points out when using “aesthetics of sustainability” in arguing for transdisciplinarity. However, the subject in Saito’s consideration is not a professional seeking to contribute to world-making, nor the learner of a formal environmental education, for whom Saito’s ideas undoubtedly can be adapted, see, e.g. Hurren (2017). Rather, Saito (2017, pp. 198, 199) regards us as dealing with unavoidable “everyday aesthetic decisions” that either hinder or facilitate in moving “toward a sustainable future” and welcomes “more informed aesthetic judgements.”

### 3.3 New Conceptualisations of Aesthetic Sensibility

Yet another approach of aesthetics towards sustainability transformations is to offer and develop such concepts, which, while describing the contemporarily relevant realm of aesthetic appreciation, also suggest practices informed by global environmental change. For example, Saito’s (2007) green aesthetics can be

considered as a “sustainable design strategy,” which by founding “care” and “sensitive attitude” as its constituents “[...] opens up the possibility of ‘nudging’ people’s aesthetic preferences towards more ecologically sustainable design solutions: we start finding something aesthetically pleasing gradually, when we know that it is ethically produced, for example” (Lehtinen, 2019, p. 117). Whereas green aesthetics focuses especially on production, the aesthetics of sustainability is located among those new conceptual formulations of aesthetic sensibility that focus on the realm of consumption in its broader meaning. Recently, for example, Arnold Berleant (2014) has proposed a concept of environmental sensibility, Madalina Diaconu (2019) the concept of weather aesthetics, and Emily Brady (2021) the concept of cryosphere aesthetics. These concepts invite us to experience and appreciate the environment, and specifically such phenomena as rain, ice, and snow, which due to global climate change are becoming ever more relevant phenomena in our orientation from the perspective of both infrastructures and experiences. Furthermore, these conceptions of aesthetic sensibility capture environmental values in the discussion of aesthetics while nevertheless resisting resignation to (scientific) cognitivism in discussing aesthetic capabilities and thus they argue against Allen Carlson’s (2014) view that could be discussed, for example, through the concept of ecological aesthetics. By discussing the relevance of “the sensuous quality experienced with sensibility,” Saito (2017, p. 4) finds it possible to consider the role of aesthetic sensibility in world-making without necessarily subsuming the aesthetic under other considerations. For example, through the concept of aesthetic sustainability, sustainability forms the central sensuous quality experienced with the new sensibility.

As a concept, the aesthetics of sustainability suggests sustainability, in all its ambiguity, as the contemporarily relevant realm of aesthetic appreciation, and it indicates movement towards establishing and developing sustainable practices, that is, both individual and cultural change. This change seems to deal with the European context, as Saito contrasts the aesthetics of sustainability with something called Western aesthetic sensibility. In Saito’s elaboration, such a sensibility seems to have, through the history of Western aesthetics discourse, mainly European origins.

Contemporary Western aesthetic sensibility, cultured in its artistic convention, such as listening to music in a concert hall, appreciating a drama on the theatre stage, and looking at paintings in a museum, is premised upon isolating the specific distal sense experience from the rest of the environment and flow of life constituted by experiences gained by proximate senses and other distal senses. (Saito, 2017, p. 46)

In contrast, as a new kind of aesthetic sensibility, the aesthetics of sustainability is premised on holistic engagement and social responsibility, and is cultured above all in everyday life (Saito, 2017). By regarding this kind of aesthetic sensibility as *more* sustainable, Saito implicitly marks out Western aesthetic sensibility’s sustainability transformation. This approach broadens the approaches of aesthetics towards sustainability transformations by locating one influential societal change within our propensity to identify aesthetic value. To foster the change, we are to cultivate our everyday aesthetic sensibility.

#### 4. Everyday Aesthetic Sensibility

In her book *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and World-Making* (2017), Saito presents the aesthetics of sustainability as more sustainable as an aesthetic sensibility due to the increased appreciation of using and developing our aesthetic sensibility in relation to everyday life. For Saito, everyday aesthetic sensibility does not mean our common, daily propensity to identify aesthetic value; rather, it denotes our sensuous and reflective relationship with the everyday. Saito (2017, p. 10) considers the everyday an experience that emanates from our mostly pragmatic attitude and experience related to objects and activities of everyday life. The pluralistic account of the everyday behind the aesthetics of sustainability combines both *restrictivist* and *expansionist* perspectives and can thus be opposed by both opponents of the everyday dispute. For example, Thomas Leddy argues from the expansionist perspective that only experiences elevating the humdrum of our life into something special cultivate aesthetic sensibility, an argument I respond to in the next section. Here, I respond to the restrictivist argument that the cultivation of everyday aesthetic sensibility is bound to experiencing everydayness proper. Through the response, I explore the influence of the current environmentally alarming situation on our aesthetic sensibilities.

It would seem plausible to hold that the environmental emergency has very little to do with the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility in urban settings today. In many European cities, climate change can still be felt as distant, and as a long-term global phenomenon it is impossible to grasp with human perception. However, while many features of global change can be – and are – parenthesised in urban experiences, climate change seems to be the feature we cannot escape for long, for it also impacts experiences in urban Europe through changing weather conditions and infrastructural mitigation of climate change. Climate change, as a topic and through the threat it also poses to urban settings, effectively popularises global environmental change. Yet overall, our daily experiences increasingly take place in the boundary conditions set by global warming and its effects, of which sustainability transformations are hopefully the constructive ones.

In urban Europe, those changes that dismantle the exploitation of nature, support biodiversity, and reduce inequalities are promoted, represented, discussed, and perhaps increasingly also lived in a way such that being acquainted with the idea of climate change, or its mitigation, is a daily experience. For example, in Finland, sustainability is promoted as a guiding principle for nearly all development as a general solution to the problems posed by global warming. A sustainable way of life, sustainable development, and a sustainable future are key themes in contemporary politics, business, and both basic and high education. Media increasingly addresses climate change (Lyytimäki et al., 2020). Public transportation, shopping centres, coffee culture, and packaging perceivably advertise environmental friendliness, which is bound to related systems as well as in general. Individuals ponder animal-based diets, private driving, and clean energy in everyday discussions. The concept of climate anxiety is part of everyday speech.

In countries that strive for achieving sustainability goals, climate change and its mitigation arguably form a part of contemporary everydayness. Thus, everyday experiences could be considered increasingly filtered by climate change in a way that Lissa Skitolsky (2019) considers “the distortion of sensory experience.” Skitolsky (2019, p. 503) describes the functioning of such a filter in her Holocaust-related discussion as “[...] a predisposition to see, read, and imagine all facts in relation to the holocaust until this atrocity starts to act like an a priori condition of sense perception and the understanding [...]” Similarly, through sustainability transformations, knowledge about human-induced global change and its devastating effects, like the mass extinction of species and the threat to ecosystems and humanity, increasingly functions as a predisposition of experience despite our possible indifference to or denial of the environmental emergency. In this situation, everydayness seems a less stable and comforting experience than previously proposed.

In everyday aesthetics, the everydayness has been characterised as nearly unnoticed, often routine-bound, and the familiar experiential backbone of our daily lives. Saito agrees with Ossi Naukkarinen in that “[...] creative experiments, exceptions, constant questioning and change, analyses, and deep reflections [...]” are not characteristics of everyday attitudes (Naukkarinen, 2013, in Saito, 2017, p.10). Instead, they hold that, for example, habits and the “slow process of acclimatization” describe experiencing the everyday. This conception of the everyday is challenged, for example, by Kalle Puolakka (2019), who shows through analysing the everydayness of Valery Gergiev that such character of everyday experience and attitudes is not universal. Another challenge to the restrictivist conception is posed by sustainability transformations, for they demand rapid and constant changes in everyday practices and thus shake the familiarity of our daily lives. Against the restrictivist conception, I would argue that especially in urban settings, change as an idea, experience, and need colours everydayness in the age of a societally acknowledged environmental emergency.

The aesthetics of sustainability as a new and environmentally more sustainable propensity to identify aesthetic value is fostered through our sensuous and reflective relationship with the everyday, to which the immanence of change gives a flavour. Furthermore, Saito (2017) proposes, and I agree, that our everyday aesthetic sensibility also develops through experiences that usually are not considered a part of everyday life as such. Saito suggests three strategies to cultivate everyday aesthetic sensibility – *defamiliarisation*, *familiarisation*, and *experiencing the familiar as familiar* – and illustrates the strategies by exploring experiences with art, the environment, and everyday activities. Saito places the third strategy, on which I focus in the next section, in the core of everyday aesthetics. Nevertheless, our propensities to identify aesthetic value in relation to everyday objects and activities are also influenced, for example, by environmental experiences and the arts. For example, through defamiliarising the sky – one of the most common aspects of our daily life – sky art exemplifies how art develops our ability to perceive aesthetically that which we tend to leave unnoticed in everyday life (Saito,

2017, pp. 72–92).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, through the example of wind farms, Saito (2017, pp. 93–114) states that familiarising ourselves with such environmental elements, which evoke strangeness and negative aesthetic responses, develops our ability to appreciate the previously unappreciated with the result that our aesthetic judgements may change. Besides developing our aesthetic abilities to perceive and appreciate, art and environmental experiences have, I think, yet another function in cultivating our aesthetic sensibility.

Art and environmental experiences mediate and generate in us the already proposed sense of the everyday that is coloured by the immanence of change. Artworks question our unsustainable way of life, for example, by generating in us a sense of loss (Welsch, 2020) and by providing imaginative terrain for the evolution of solutions in climate change mitigation (Mikkonen, 2021). Environmental conditions, like great floods and storms and the lack – or surprising presence – of snow or some species in urban areas, make environmental change perceivable and stress our intergenerational awareness as well as our awareness of, for example, the global change drivers of consumption and pollution. Also, for example, exploring new routes in cities due to diminished areas dedicated to cars may evoke reflection in reference to climate change and established change in practices like increased biking and, less obviously also, skiing in city centres.<sup>6</sup> Those kinds of experiences that rupture the routines of our daily life display change and thus facilitate reflection on change in general. In the current situation, the experienced immanence of change felt through those experiences becomes easily representative of our everyday experience. Therefore, everydayness also influences our everyday aesthetic sensibility through those experiences that stand out in our daily life.

## 5. Practising for Cultivation

Experiencing the familiar as familiar, the third strategy to cultivate everyday aesthetic sensibility, brings into consideration whether “[...] the quiet, unarticulated aesthetic satisfaction interwoven with the flow of daily life” (Saito, 2017, p. 124) also cultivates aesthetic sensibility in us and thus develops the aesthetics of sustainability. Saito (2017, pp. 126–134) exemplifies the strategy by considering laundering as both a way to work with aesthetic judgements and an aesthetically relevant everyday activity itself. While laundering, we can be multisensorily and bodily engaged with the activity as well as imaginatively and intergenerationally connected with others and their possible aesthetic experiences, aside from considering both the immediate and mediated aesthetic results of the work and using our awareness of the related aesthetic, environmental, and social aspects, among others, to mould our practice.

<sup>5</sup> Saito (2017, pp. 74–80) refers to such artworks as Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* (1976, Utah), Anish Kapoor’s *Cloud Gate* (2004, Chicago), and James Turrell’s *Roden Crater* (under construction, northern Arizona).

<sup>6</sup> The Finnish city of Lahti introduced City Skis as a part of the Lahti – European Green Capital 2021 project (greenlahti, 2021).

In addition to enriching and enlivening our everyday life as well as sharpening our aesthetic sensibility, there are benefits for cultivating this kind of everyday aesthetic experience. Because aesthetic sensibility requires that we overcome our normal attitude toward the object, event, and environment, it essentially amounts to developing open-mindedness and receptivity regarding these things. We encourage ourselves to put aside preconceived ideas associated with them and allow them to speak to us and engage us. Such open-mindedness and receptivity have ethical importance. They also guide us to live mindfully by paying careful attention to things and surroundings. In short, our aesthetic horizons become widened and our lives enriched. (Saito, 2017, pp. 17–18)

With the strategy of experiencing the familiar as familiar, Saito holds, and I agree, that we need to recognise and increase aesthetic consideration also in relation to those experiences and activities we tend to leave outside the aesthetic domain. The view has relevance in terms of the social sustainability of the aesthetics of sustainability; using and developing propensities to identify aesthetic value is not exclusively a matter for those who have access to certain preconditioned experiences. However, establishing the set of the most suitable activities to cultivate such an aesthetic sensibility that would amount to increased environmental sustainability is problematic, if not impossible, and can come to be considered unsustainable; the perspectives on developing sustainability diverge, for example, concerning reliance on technology, even among those who actively strive to transform societies, businesses, and practices towards the sustainable well-being of both people and non-human nature (Soininen et al., 2021). In Saito's elaboration, such decision-making seems unnecessary, because through the defamiliarisation strategy, for example, unsustainable activities can also contribute to the formation of the new aesthetic sensibility. For instance, representations of a carnivorous lifestyle can in some cases be effective in eclipsing propensities to identify aesthetic value in relation to food. Nevertheless, I think Saito's aesthetics of sustainability is implicitly founded on one practice.

Although Saito does not address or define mindfulness as such when elaborating the aesthetics of sustainability, mindfulness seems crucially important for the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility. According to Saito (2017, p. 31), "mindful attention" is one of the common features of the "diverse modes of aesthetic experience," and Saito writes, in accordance with "mindful attention," that "[...] paying attention and bringing background to the foreground is simply making something invisible visible and is necessary for any kind of aesthetic experience, whether of the extraordinary or of the ordinary" (Saito, 2017, p. 24).<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the keys to cultivating everyday aesthetic sensibility are in learning and teaching a "mindful way of living" (Saito, 2017, esp. pp. 59, 210). Leddy (2021, p. 10) remarks on Saito's focus on "mindful self-actualisation" and acknowledges, albeit contrastingly, the value of mindfulness for everyday life and the cultivation of

<sup>7</sup> One should, of course, add that such an act is also about making inaudible audible etc., and I believe Saito does not use this only as a metaphorical expression.

aesthetic sensibility.<sup>8</sup> However, Leddy is not concerned with the development of an environmentally sustainable aesthetic sensibility but rather the key problem in everyday aesthetics: how to pay attention to the familiar without making it special.

Leddy (2021) reserves the key role in cultivating aesthetic sensibility for aesthetic attitude, for “making special.” Leddy (2021, p. 13) is reluctant to agree with the three strategies to cultivate everyday aesthetic sensibility and argues against Saito that mindfulness weakly defamiliarises the experienced, like washing dishes, when speaking of everyday activities. Mindfulness allows us to look at ordinary things in a slightly different way. Common conceptions of mindfulness include “awareness of external objects, internal sensations,” “controlling emotions,” and “being in the present moment” (Hitchcock et al., 2016). Following Leddy (2021, p. 9), who in my opinion recognises mindfulness primarily as a virtue, “mindful perception” is “engaging and pleasurable,” which amounts to our motivation, wherein lies mindfulness’s relevance for increasing aesthetic experiences in everyday life.<sup>9</sup> I mostly agree. The secular and prevalent practice of mindfulness aims at practitioners’ changed way of living (Rahmani, 2021). As a practice, it is firmly rooted in everyday life. Everyday activities of breathing, walking, talking, and eating accommodate its exercises, enabling continuous mindfulness practice. One can informally practise mindfulness, for example, while brushing one’s teeth, besides engaging in formal practice through mindfulness meditation (Canby et al., 2021). Mindfulness meditation also promisingly seems to alleviate depression and stress, which leave their mark on one’s everyday life (Canby et al., 2021; Cullen et al., 2021). Nevertheless, I believe that in practice, mindfulness is not so much about making special than it is about remaining familiar. Which of these paths our practice depends on matters, because activities are temporally (and spatially) based on each other – an issue into which Saito’s three strategies provide insight.

First, mindfulness practitioners are, I believe, likely to experience the familiar as familiar because at least those who have established the practice in their daily life are familiar with mindful perception. I have encountered secular mindfulness as being taught and referred to as a tool to enhance one’s ability to perceive the present situation while at the same time perceiving one’s engagement in the perception. To my understanding, such practice essentially concerns caring about and for the functioning of oneself – in all its familiar unfamiliarity – in each moment. Understanding mindfulness – or meditation used in mindfulness practice – as a tool to achieve improved mental health, well-being, the realisation of human potential, and even resilience is common among mindfulness practitioners and, as Masoumeh

<sup>8</sup> Leddy (2021) refers to Vietnamese *Thiền* (Zen) Buddhist Master Thich Nhất Hạnh (1926–), whereas Saito’s (2017) discussion leans on the Japanese Zen Buddhism of Dōgen (1200–1253). Secular mindfulness practice also originates from Buddhist traditions; Indian/Burmese Vipassanā meditation teacher Satya Narayan Goenka (1924–2013) has been particularly influential (Rahmani, 2021). My understanding of mindfulness is based on secular mindfulness as well as practising and studying yoga (Korpelainen, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> One can discuss mindfulness’s role in cultivating aesthetic sensibility from the perspective of practice-based virtue theory as well. Here, I have limited my approach to action-oriented aesthetics, following Saito.

Rahmani (2021) holds, has a history in mindfulness rhetoric.<sup>10</sup> Saito (2017, p. 47) notes in relation to everyday experiences, “We certainly can isolate one element from these multisensory experiences, but doing so takes away the usual, ordinary, everydayness of those experiences.” To experience the familiar as familiar, one needs familiarity with one’s daily functioning.

Second, when practising mindfulness, one also practises familiarising, for the practice demands active work with perception and the associated thoughts, emotions, and biases. Despite being engaging, I doubt that such an endeavour is always pleasurable. In fact, pleasure becomes reconsidered through mindfulness practice, in which a non-judgemental attitude is commonly practised when paying attention to the diverse aspects affecting the situation. Consider the following description about open monitoring (OM), which is together with focused attention widely used in mindfulness practice (Cullen et al., 2021).

OM exercises began with mentally noting and labeling thoughts, emotions and sensations according to their phenomenological classification (e.g. sound, touch, thought, etc.) and valence (e.g. positive, negative, or neutral), ultimately transitioning to silent noticing in more advanced stages of practice. Participants were encouraged to notice biases in attentional allocation and to apply “balanced coverage” across different phenomenological categories. (Cullen et al., 2021, p. 5)

Such practice encourages one to also notice one’s biases concerning pleasure. So, to familiarise, one needs to improve skills in giving attention.

Third, even if the mindful perception takes the form of defamiliarisation, it does not necessarily follow that one experiences something special or extraordinary. Improving attention skills is constitutive of focused attention, an exercise commonly portrayed in mindfulness discourse by rehearsal in which one focuses either perceptually or metaphorically on the sky instead of passing clouds. Saito (2017, pp. 72–92) discusses such an activity, with awareness of the Buddhist tradition, in relation to sky art to describe the defamiliarisation strategy.<sup>11</sup> By guiding one’s sense perception – or mental activity – to frame moving objects in relation to the sky – or the flow of thoughts – one defamiliarises the phenomenon one focuses on and gains a new perspective. Yet, “bringing the background to the foreground” does not necessarily exclude finding the experienced, like the sky, to be deeply familiar. Leddy (2021, p. 13) insists that such experience “must go beyond the merely practical.” Still, in mindfulness practice, dealing with one’s attention is a practical issue.

If practising mindfulness is a method for experiencing the familiar as familiar,<sup>12</sup> should we employ mindfulness practice for fostering sustainability transformations? Considering the prominence of mindfulness also in Europe, the practice’s promise to teach us reflection and action concerning

<sup>10</sup> Illustratively, the Oxford Mindfulness Centre’s different mission statements across the centre’s history highlight these objectives (Rahmani, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Saito (2017, p. 70) also remarks that both Chinese and Japanese Buddhist texts use the character for the sky when referring to the notion of “emptiness.”

<sup>12</sup> The methodological problem in everyday aesthetics has sprouted discussion. Very recently, Swantje Martach (2021) introduced speculative narration as a solution.

the ramifications of our daily lives' aesthetic dimension is admittedly intriguing. The perspective of positive psychology could provide justification for promoting mindfulness for sustainability ends due to apprehending aesthetic sensibility as a positive individual trait supporting subjective well-being (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). However, in case the aesthetics of sustainability necessitates mindfulness practice, such cultivation of aesthetic sensibility means, especially in the European context, a change in propensities to identify aesthetic value more in line with the Buddhist tradition. Thus, mindfulness can downplay the significance of the aesthetics of sustainability from the perspective of cultural sustainability, especially because, as Rahmani (2020) notes, secular mindfulness discourse is not always transparent in terms of the practice's Buddhist underpinning. Furthermore, for gaining effects in mindfulness meditation, social relationships with one's group members and instructor may count even more than the practice itself (Canby et al., 2021). Therefore, due to social relationships and practice situations, practising mindfulness may also become temporarily filtered by climate change, as discussed in the previous chapter. But does the aesthetics of sustainability have to be based on mindfulness?

#### 6. The Everyday Activity of Cultivating Aesthetic Sensibility

I suggest that mindfulness is not necessary, either as a practice or as a virtue, for developing the aesthetics of sustainability because other practices (for example, reflection) could be argued to have a similar function, and because, as Saito points out, “[...] moral virtues such as respect, care, consideration, and thoughtfulness are often expressed, appreciated, and cultivated through *aesthetic means*” (Saito, 2017, p. 150). Instead, I would argue that mindfulness encouragingly exemplifies the power of everyday activities to influence our aesthetic sensibilities, and thus it paves the way for understanding the influence of those practices that concern, for example, food, energy, and mobility for our aesthetic sensibilities. Furthermore, the three strategies entail cultivating aesthetic sensibility essentially as an everyday activity. Based on the discussion in the previous section, such a proposal implies our aesthetic engagement with the cultivation that is due to sharpen our aesthetic sensibility, and it suggests everyday aesthetic experiences of the cultivation – experiences which can be increasingly flavoured by the immanence of change.

Regarding the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility as an everyday activity instead of an artistic activity means understanding aesthetic sensibility as a life-long condition of continuous value negotiation. It includes having a sensuous and reflective relationship with one's aesthetic experiences, judgements, and actions and the increasing consideration of the use and development of one's propensity to identify aesthetic value. Saito's three strategies to cultivate everyday aesthetic sensibility pinpoint attitude tactics, daily managing and developing of attitudes and participation in affective relationships. As Saito states, we need to

[...] discriminate between when and in what context it is appropriate and desirable to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary and when it is better to recognize negative aesthetic experiences as

negative so that we can work on changing them in the literal sense.  
(Saito, 2017, p. 31)

The everyday activity of cultivating aesthetic sensibility thus means having sensitivity to different kinds of aesthetic experiences and qualities as well as resistance to maintaining one particular aesthetic taste, and hence choosing to sustain the cultivation, both the use and development of aesthetic sensibility, in a way that is also intergenerationally sensitive to the overall possibility of continuing the cultivation. It is in this sense that I find the aesthetics of sustainability manifesting as a sustainability transformation.

As an aesthetic sensibility that is based on enduring change, the aesthetics of sustainability critiques its very idea because, if sustainability is to be understood as an aesthetic value, sustainability must also remain renegotiated. In the current situation of environmental emergency and especially within urban settings, various sustainability goals are often promoted in a way that creates the illusion of a juncture after which we would not have to strive for changing our practices towards the well-being of nature and other beings. I think that such a feature, which could be called aspiring for aesthetics *after* sustainability, may increasingly characterise cultivating aesthetic sensibility. For this reason, I suggest that the aesthetics of sustainability is better appreciated as a means than an end, that is, not as a utopian future but as a necessary transition towards sustainable futures.

## 7. Conclusion

Fostering sustainability is intertwined with the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility. Yuriko Saito presents the aesthetics of sustainability as an aesthetically informed solution for sustainable development and bases it on cultivating everyday aesthetic sensibility, especially through experiencing the familiar as familiar. Through focusing on the aesthetics of sustainability, I hope to have shown that, while we can and need to acknowledge the value of the arts for the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility, everyday life and its activities are crucial for cultivating an aesthetic sensibility that supports sustainability transformations. Furthermore, the aesthetics of sustainability manifests as a necessary transition powered by our life-long processes of cultivating aesthetic sensibility, to which sustainability is not an end.

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