

Everyday Aesthetics Solving Social Problems

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What is the role of aesthetics, everyday aesthetics in particular, in processes of solving social problems? Many if not most social problems arise from and affect our daily lives. As far as these problems contain aesthetic aspects, these typically are also of an everyday kind. In this paper, I address the relations between social problems and everyday aesthetics in five sections. I will start by briefly describing what I mean by social problems. Second, I will outline what solving such problems means. Then, I will move on to defining aesthetics for the purposes of this article. Fourth, I will focus on the main question, the potential role of everyday aesthetics in solving social problems. Lastly, I will drill down a bit deeper into my own experiences in this matter in order to concretize the general points and give examples stemming from my working life. | Keywords: *Aesthetics, Everyday Aesthetics, Problem Solving, Social Problems*

1. Introduction

What is the role of aesthetics, everyday aesthetics in particular, in processes of solving social problems? Many if not most social problems arise from and affect our daily lives. As far as these problems contain aesthetic aspects, these typically are also of an everyday kind. In this paper, I address the relations between social problems and everyday aesthetics in five sections. I will start by briefly describing what I mean by social problems. Second, I will outline what solving such problems means. Then, I will move on to defining aesthetics for the purposes of this article. Fourth, I will focus on the main question, the potential role of everyday aesthetics in solving social problems. Lastly, I will drill down a bit deeper into my own experiences in this matter in order to concretize the general points and give examples stemming from my working life.

The motivation for the essay originally came from a group of students. In spring 2021, students of aesthetics at the University of Helsinki, Finland, organized a lecture series called *Aesthetics Solving (Social) Problems*. I was invited to be one of the speakers. At first glance, the theme seemed somewhat

odd to me. Do they think that aestheticians can ‘solve’ social problems? Why should we? Is this not just another strand of the madness through which even students have been brainwashed to think that everything that universities do must have a social impact and be directly useful? Isn’t it enough that we address philosophical problems? Or perhaps analyse social problems without trying to solve them?

However, as it often happens, the students had been cleverer than me. The issue, indeed, is a fruitful one to ponder. It helps us to see what the role and value of aesthetics is in academia and elsewhere, and what aestheticians can be expected (not) to do. Thinking of this also offers a more general framework for this text. Why do we bother spending our time and energy on aesthetics in the first place? Do we have the right – or even the duty – to do that, and why?

Contrary to my first reaction, I do welcome the idea that it is one motivation for being an aesthetician to believe that the aesthetic approach is valuable for our societies at large because it can offer tools to tackle social problems and thus improve our daily lives. This is by no means the only reason to be an aesthetician, and it is clear that aesthetics alone cannot solve a single social problem, and that it can even cause others. However, we can have an interesting and important role in the whole, and I will try to say something about what this role may be and what it means in practice.

There is a long tradition of addressing the role of aesthetics in and of social life – in some cases focusing on social problems – starting from Plato’s *Republic* and continuing via David Hume’s *Of the Standard of Taste*, Friedrich Schiller’s *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, and John Dewey’s *Art as Experience*, to contemporary authors such as Arnold Berleant (2019), Thomas Leddy (2012), Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy (2013), Sianne Ngai (2012), Jacques Rancière (2000), Monique Roelofs (2014), and others. The space this article provides does not allow me to contextualise in any detail my own approach in this rich tradition. However, it can be said that offering an interpretation of the positive potential of the aesthetic point of view in our daily lives, and in solving social problems in particular, takes me close to the pragmatist tradition as developed by Dewey and his legacy: Aesthetics exists and affects our lives in everyday practices, and it cannot be detached from other aspects of life. Here, I offer some suggestions for characterising such an approach without aiming at a comprehensive coverage of the theme, or at a detailed case-study.

2. The Nature of Social Problems

Some of the main aspects of social problems can be summarized in a short list. First, they are problems that negatively affect large groups of people; they are not challenges that are rare and concern only some individual members of society. Second, they have to do with human life and relations, although they can also affect animals and other non-human beings. Third, they cannot be dealt with, understood, or solved from any single point of view, but require a combination of perspectives to be addressed – economic, political, technical,

philosophical, material, aesthetic, etc. – even though they are often the ‘main’ area of interest especially for politicians and political activists. Fourth, often it is not even quite clear what is a social problem or whether a phenomenon is a problem at all.

Examples of social problems are related to themes such as poverty, hunger, racism, gender inequality, homelessness, violence, unemployment, immigration, access to education, and data security. The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals is probably the most comprehensive framework for addressing such intertwined problems that are also tightly related to environmental problems. Such issues affect everyone’s daily life, whether we suffer from them directly or indirectly. To take a more focused example, we can discuss whether it is a social problem that the unemployment rate is 5%. If it is, we will discuss what causes it and what it causes, who is responsible for it, how it could be improved, how it is related to other social problems, and so on.

3. Solving Social Problems

It is notoriously difficult to solve social problems. Various kinds of political, religious, and ethical systems and practices, combined with numerous economic models and technologies, have been tried out over the past centuries to improve our lives: democracies, meritocracies, dictatorships, Buddhism, Islam, Maoism, Keynesian politics, neo-liberalism, and many more. This has not solved all social problems, of course – not to mention environmental problems – and new ones arise as some old ones are met. However difficult it might sometimes be to remember, much has still been achieved, and in many countries the average life is much better and easier than it was, say, a century ago. This is especially true in Europe and in other Western countries, but also elsewhere.¹

But what does solving a social problem mean? Of course, we do have problems that are rather easy to solve, such as puzzles, crosswords, and sudokus. Many scientific, mathematical, and logical problems are typically more demanding than puzzles, but can be as fun to solve while they can also open ways to very useful applications. Still, they can be solved once and for all. Once such problems are solved, they are done for good, we know the answers and they are no longer problems for us. Social problems are not like this.

First, we must identify a problem. Is the 5% unemployment rate a problem? (I am not sure.) Is it a problem if the Olympic Games are organized in China where some of the country’s minorities are treated in a very harsh and inhumane manner? (In my opinion, this is a problem.) Is it a problem if universities have tuition fees and not everyone can afford to have an education? (I believe it is.) Even this first step is often very difficult to take, and we will not find agreement.

¹ For good overviews on local and global improvements, see Pinker (2018) and Rosling, Rosling and Rosling Rönnlund (2018).

When we have identified a problem, no matter whether everyone agrees, it must be analysed. What exactly is wrong with the situation? What should be changed, i.e., improved, and why? How could this be done? Sometimes we end up just noticing that we have a problem, but will remain unable, even in principle, to find a solution. We have no idea how to get rid of this problem. Then, we just have to live with it and get used to it. I doubt that many who consider themselves 'realists' tend to think this way of many social problems, such as global educational inequality. Luckily, not everyone is a realist in this sense, and sometimes solutions are found for even those problems that have seemed impossible to tackle: getting rid of the official apartheid system in South-Africa, deciding to offer equal voting rights for men, women, and others in numerous countries, teaching major parts of populations to read and write, and so on. Yet, at least for periods of time, there are problems that especially those who are affected by them cannot even think of how to solve them.

For some other problems, someone can invent solutions in principle, but cannot take things forward in practice. There might be other groups of people who do not believe that the solution might work. Perhaps we might have a technology that is needed but no money to buy it (say, a sanitation system in poor countries). Or someone might be of the opinion that the offered solution will cause even more problems in some other context. The attempts to change the US healthcare system is a well-known example of an extremely many-faceted issue full of different approaches and suggestions, failures and partial successes over the past decades. Brexit is a telling European example. The difference between completely unresolvable and practically extremely difficult problems is not sharp, however.

In a normal case, we are forced to come up with several alternative solutions and their combinations and discuss them, at least in normal cases within European and other mostly democratic systems. One important aspect of such discussions is who could offer an idea for a solution and who, in turn, could actually realize it in practice and how: For example, if ideas come from politicians or scientists, should the execution phase be taken care of by private companies or the public sector? Moreover, there should be an idea of when and by using which criteria we can conclude that the problem is solved, and how this can be verified – or do we have a problem that won't ever be solved for good but requires a continued fight, as is the case with many diseases? Clever decision-makers also try to foresee what kinds of new problems will arise when the old ones are solved or partially tackled. For example, when we increase the usage of computers and remote work in education in order to be more effective and flexible, how does that affect energy consumption and social contact?

All this is very complex and challenging, and I truly admire those who try to address the most burning global social problems, often risking their privacy, freedom, or even life. It is amazing how many things have been improved despite the myriad obstacles we face in such processes. But how is all this related to everyday aesthetics?

4. Aesthetics, in the Plural

It can be claimed that social problems are serious issues that require lots of political power, money, and developed technologies to be tackled, whereas aestheticians play around with art, beauty, and other lighter shades of life. I do not think this is a totally justified picture, and the counter-argument is related to how we understand what aesthetics is or, actually, are. After we have an answer to this question, we can try to work out the role of various types of aesthetics in solving social problems.

Elsewhere, I have repeatedly argued that aesthetics should be understood in the plural, agreeing with some of my colleagues such as Wolfgang Iser.² Here, I won't address the question of what all the possible variations of aesthetics are, but will only refer to some features that are relevant to several family members, covering very theoretical, philosophical, and academic as well as practical, mundane, and non-academic everyday variations of aesthetics. By academic variations I refer to cases or instances of aesthetics that are practised (mostly) in universities: reading and writing books and articles, focusing on philosophical issues, often related to art but sometimes also to everyday aesthetics, building up verbal argumentation chains, studying the history of previous colleagues, running research projects, translating texts from one language to another, and so on. Practical aesthetics, in turn, is carried out by artists, cooks, hairdressers, tattooists, athletes, designers, gardeners, and many others in their practices. They produce objects and events and by doing that change how the world looks and feels, even if they do not necessarily have to talk and verbally analyse what they do. They have physical, hands-on skills. But they, too, focus on similar things as academics, but from a different perspective.

Similar things? Here, I only mention a limited number of themes that are often and typically addressed by people who are interested in aesthetics, either from a theoretical or practical point of view or from both, from the everyday point of view or otherwise.

The first area of interest is sensitive and careful sense-based evaluation of things that are seen, heard, tasted, touched, felt, and smelled. The central issues of this theme are, for example, what is a sense-based approach and how it can be skilfully practised? How do our senses function, e.g. in relation to logical thinking? And how do we evaluate things via perception? For academics, this family of questions has been relevant since Alexander Baumgarten at the latest, and for practical aestheticians, forever.

Another variation of this theme focuses on clarifying how operating on a non-formally logical and non-metric or non-measuring basis works. How does measuring and calculating differ from aesthetic, sense-based evaluation, or from using the faculty of taste? This, too, was one of Baumgarten's concerns, as it was David Hume's, and it is of particular interest to professions such as architecture where one has to master both calculations and a sense-based

² For example, Naukkarinen (2020) and Iser (1997).

approach. In a digital era when/area where more and more things are done by computers and/or by computational methods, this discussion has garnered new and complex aspects.

Emotions, bodily feelings, sensations, and experiences have always been of interest to aestheticians. How do we invoke (positive) emotions? How do we direct them appropriately? Plato and Aristotle were already pondering this, as most probably were cave painters much earlier. Later John Dewey, for example, had much to say about the theme.

The roles of particularity and generality in the realm of aesthetics continue to puzzle. Is every perceived thing of its own kind when approached carefully enough? How do particular things differ from general ones? Are there rules or universal features for aesthetic evaluation? Immanuel Kant had his own thoughts about this in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, and the recent discussions around evolutionary aesthetics follow suit from a very different point of view.

Traditionally, since Hegel, art has been one of the main areas of aestheticians' interest, but more recently the relations of the arts to other aesthetic phenomena and everyday aesthetics itself have also received more and more attention. How do artists master the phenomena mentioned above? What is the difference between artists' approach and that of others? This has been the question ever since the concept of art started to evolve and artists were seen as something else than 'ordinary' people or craftsmen. When this process really started is a matter of dispute.³

Often, aestheticians have a very good understanding of the history of the above-mentioned phenomena. We know how they have been addressed before and what is new. This helps us to see how I could do something else than my predecessors, yet be part of the continuum. Artists have sometimes desperately been willing to be geniuses, creating something completely unforeseen. This becomes evident, for example, in disputes between the *anciens et modernes*, and modernists versus post-modernists. Unlike in engineering and sciences, old things will not necessarily become useless in the arts and humanities.

Aesthetics is also typically related to the inclination to discuss and verbalize the things just described. What do we say and write, what kind of terminology is needed and how is it connected with the senses, emotions, and other issues mentioned above? Should I verbalize at all, or should I rather concentrate on painting or sculpting? Are there levels or aspects of aesthetic activities that cannot be verbalized and are completely ineffable? Everyone who has taught academic aesthetics in art schools has faced radically differing opinions about this family of questions.

All these issues are of interest and seen as valuable areas of discussion in the discourse of aesthetics – and practised in some form. Some of the incarnations of aesthetics probably have an evolutionary, biological basis, which is, however, strongly affected by our cultures, resulting in numerous different outcomes. In any case, the urge to see aesthetically gratifying things, create them, talk

³ For this discussion, see e.g. Shiner (2001) and Young (2015).

about them, own them, and have emotionally satisfying experiences with them is part of human nature. Some individuals value the aesthetic more than others, but it is very rare for someone not to care about it at all. It is one of our perspectives, albeit many-faceted, to the world around us. Without it, our world would be completely different.⁴

What kinds of (aesthetic) things are held as being of the everyday type varies from perceiver to perceiver. For a painter, looking at things extremely carefully and creating your own pictures are daily activities. On the other hand, it might be that for such a person, cooking and its aesthetic aspects are not. There is no list of things that tells us which things belong to the sphere of everyday aesthetics and which do not, but everydayness has to do with one's *relations* with things. Whatever aesthetic (or otherwise) is familiar, well-known, and often-encountered, has great potential for being part of our everyday. Moreover, we tend to get used to almost everything rather quickly. Even things that initially may feel very strange tend to become everyday items.⁵

5. Aesthetics in and of Social Problems

From the perspective of social problems, what is relevant in all this? First, aesthetic objects and activities clearly affect our well-being. It is a social problem in its own right if they are not noticed at all, or if they are poorly taken care of. How, exactly, art and other aesthetic activities improve the quality of life, and whose life they improve, is an area of dispute. There is no one-size-fits-all model for this issue. Some value verbal, others visual, and a third group tactile activities. And some probably do not care very much at all about the aesthetic aspects of the world around them. Yet, considering the sheer mass and long history of all kinds of aesthetic activities, there is undoubtedly something very positive in it all for the majority of people. This leads me to deduce that the aim should be to create positive aesthetic phenomena for society our everyday life. Not doing so is a social problem.

The question is, of course, what this means in practice, and in different contexts. There is no unanimous agreement on what is beautiful or otherwise aesthetically good or positive. Chart lists in music show what a large group of people like in their daily lives right now, but such is not valid for everyone. Nonetheless, whatever we decide to do always and necessarily has aesthetic aspects to it, and these can be more or less positive or negative. Even if it is not clear what exactly should be aimed at or produced, we should try to aim at socially beneficial aesthetic solutions. It is worse if we do not even try – that, in itself, is a potential social problem.

If we accept this, the next question is what society should do to support and promote a rich and fruitful (everyday) aesthetic culture? Offer respective education, support artists financially, guide contents, or give absolute freedom in that respect? I am personally not in favour of providing fixed answers and solutions, but in supporting ways in which such issues can be

⁴ For a more detailed discussion on variations of aesthetics, see Naukkarinen (2020).

⁵ For an analysis on what makes some things everyday-like, see Naukkarinen (2013).

fruitfully discussed and resolved again and again. I am for offering space and resources for aesthetic activities, not for control and censorship. This could perhaps be seen as a modest variation of 'Adornian' aesthetics: urge people to seek their own solutions actively and not force anything on them. New solutions do not *necessarily* differ from the old ones, but the old ones can be constantly re-evaluated. Encourage people to demonstrate, show, and exemplify their own aesthetics, as Adorno did with his *Ästhetische Theorie*.

Of course, what people may come up with may eventually be unacceptable and harmful, but I would rather take this risk and react to troubles if and when they appear, than have strict pre-censorship and lists of acceptable themes, techniques, or content. In my opinion, this way of thinking represents some of the core European values, emphasizing both freedom and responsibility. In another context, it is very well expressed in the Magna Charta declaration of a network of universities. (Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum, 2018)

I am aware that this attitude is not easy to have in the discussion of phenomena such as those addressed by the MeToo movement. Why did we let all that abuse happen? Why did we not control these things better and prohibit harmful practices in advance? It took too long before people said that certain things cannot continue. There are very clear cases of not acceptable deeds that are also violations of law, although many of them were hidden. But if we are not talking about such glaring cases, even now it is not simple to have universally valid lists of acceptable and unacceptable deeds and activities. I am personally for aesthetic freedom, but it brings responsibility with it. It does not mean that everything is OK, but what is and what is not is often related to social problems that simply do not have easy solutions. Moreover, it is not always easy to say which things are aesthetically problematic and which are problematic in some other respects. How should different types of people be represented in films, for example? If some are presented as ugly, is this a problem? And what kind of problem is it? What kinds of jokes are acceptable in stand-up shows? How do you write a novel about racism without promoting it? What kinds of new houses can be built in an old neighbourhood? We have no other good option than to discuss, compare different proposals, and try to give good reasons to do or not to do something. My point thus is that despite the impossibility of actually proving what is aesthetically good and finding solutions that will serve everyone, we should be willing and able to *consciously and actively develop and argue* for some solutions.

Second, even if most or even all social problems include many important aspects that do not have anything to do with aesthetics, aesthetic aspects do play a significant role in many social problems, and most if not all social problems have some aesthetic aspects. So, even if we are not discussing 'purely' or 'mainly' aesthetic social problems, many types of social problems also include aesthetic aspects, and these should be addressed with skill. If they need improvement and we can offer that, the problem can be partly addressed and improved, even if not completely solved. Why would we not do that?

But the question still remains: How can poverty, hunger, racism, gender inequality, data security, physical violence, unemployment, immigration, or access to education be addressed in such a way that it would be wise and relevant to focus on aesthetics, among other things? I cannot underline too strongly that of course all of them require political, economic, technical, and many other types of handling, and the aesthetic approach is probably not the most important one. But the aesthetic can still be one aspect whose skilful treatment eases the whole to some extent. Unemployed people remain unemployed as long as they do not have a job. But if they have the possibility to do something aesthetically rewarding, their life might be a little bit better. Access to art might help immigrants to adapt to a new culture. Soothing aesthetic activities might help victims of physical violence to recover.

My core argument is this: Whenever we try to improve things, any things, we must make decisions and choose some options over others. Often, several options can have more or less similar prices, technical characteristics, and some other features, but they may differ aesthetically. In such cases, why should we not opt for the better aesthetic version – while (or if) that improves the overall situation?

Moreover, even if different options had different technical, economic, or other characteristics, one differing characteristic that can have a significant role in decision-making is aesthetics: What looks, feels, or sounds more tempting, beautiful, or cool? We should understand what this means in different contexts. In some cases it can lead to an improvement, in some other cases, it leads to a worsening. For example, it has been shown repeatedly that in social relations, we estimate each other's looks constantly, and that this strongly affects how we treat each other.⁶ It affects our decision-making and, through that, well-being. It contributes to potential social problems. People who are considered to be good-looking tend to be treated differently, i.e., better, in practically all walks of life: education, work life, courts, hospitals, and so on. This is why the phenomenon should be understood and perhaps controlled better. Otherwise, it may increase inequality. If, and as, we hire people because they 'look better', we may not get the best employees; and those who are not hired may remain unemployed and with too little money for their daily lives, even though they might be perfectly suitable for a particular job. If good-looking patients get more attention in hospitals, it probably has an impact on their recovery. And what happens if we choose a piece of software because it looks tempting, even if its security is not good enough? Yes, aesthetically gratifying things improve the quality of life, but our aesthetically justified choices are not always quite innocent from other perspectives.

However, when we are solving social problems of daily life, an important point is that we have to create solutions that people like to use, feel that they are worth having, or at least ones that people do not actively dislike or feel to be ugly, disgusting, or threatening: aesthetically good options. Otherwise, good things won't come into the mainstream – and social problems will continue.

⁶ E.g., Patzer (2008).

Yuriko Saito, for example, has touched upon this ‘power of aesthetics’ in the contexts of so-called green design and elsewhere.⁷ We can design very good products and services that do not waste materials and energy, are easy to use and recycle, are produced in good working conditions, and are not too expensive. But if they are considered boring or downright ugly, they won’t have a chance to become popular, because they do not suit people’s everyday aesthetics – and the social problems intertwined with environmental problems will continue. Aesthetically displeasing politicians offering clumsy, un-catchy slogans and programmes won’t get their ideas further, even if their ideas having to do with poverty, inequality, or any other social problems of our daily lives are good in some other ways. Some would like to erase aesthetics from politics or from elsewhere, but this is impossible. It is stupid and irresponsible to pretend that it could be done, and to leave this power unused. The aesthetic power should be used for solving social problems, and forgetting about it may just create or strengthen problems. Both Barack Obama and Donald Trump were very aware of and skilful in this. They just had different ideas of what is a problem and what kind of everyday aesthetics is, well, great. The question of relations between aesthetics and politics is age-old, of course, and was already addressed by Plato in his *Republic*.

6. My Own Role in Solving Social Problems

I was trained as an aesthetician. I hold a PhD in aesthetics, and I have been publishing and teaching for some 30 years in the field. I believe that this qualifies me as some sort of expert. My present position, however, is not one in which I can primarily focus on aesthetics in the traditional academic sense of the word. I am Vice President for research at Aalto University (Finland), where we educate and do research in fields such as chemical engineering, electrical engineering, civil engineering, ICT, business, economics, physics, design, and architecture. It is a combination of different types of technology, business, science, and art and design approaches. My job is to support all these fields and their cross-cutting areas which, as a leadership task, is both very fascinating and difficult. I do not mention this to promote myself or my university but to concretize the general considerations I presented above: What can addressing social problems mean from one particular perspective I happen to know.

In the founding and strategy documents of the university, a practice-oriented approach is emphasized: One – but not the only one – of our tasks is to improve the innovation capacity of the country. Our Constitution expresses it like this: “The special national mission of the Foundation shall be to sustain Finland’s success, to contribute to Finnish society, its economy, technology, art and design, internationalization and competitiveness and to promote the welfare of humankind and the environment” (Aalto University Foundation, 2016). This, of course, does not mean that free basic or blue-skies research, with no immediate applications, is not carried out and highly valued; their role is also secured by the Constitution. However, in my understanding, this

⁷ E.g., Saito (2007 and 2017).

means that we must do our share in solving social problems, giving our input into the complex whole. We do what we can to make the world a bit better. We try to come up with scientific, technical, business, and art and design solutions that are sustainable in various ways but also aesthetically rewarding and interesting to use. And we try our best to educate our students to be professionals who can do the same in the future. Whether we succeed in this or not, and how we compare to other universities in this respect is for someone else to estimate.

How is everyday aesthetics related to all this? First, I believe that it is fair to say that in Aalto University's daily activities and investment decisions aesthetics has a fairly good position, even if the word 'aesthetics' is not always used. We have an entire school with more than 2,000 students and over 400 faculty and staff members dedicated to art, design, and architecture. We have an arts programme through which we buy and exhibit art in our premises. Our campus has several buildings designed by the architect Alvar Aalto, and new buildings are carefully planned to meet the standards of his legacy. These are rather local cases of emphasising the value of aesthetics, but they may contribute to solving social problems more generally by giving an example of how aesthetic issues can be valued and practically dealt with by an institution such as a university. They, hopefully, contribute to well-being.

But this is not everything Aalto tries to do. It is explicitly stated in our strategic guidelines that creativity must be actively promoted in all our fields and our six schools. In practice, this often means that art-related or other aesthetically interesting activities are combined with other approaches, although creativity is not always related to the arts, of course. The whole idea of the Aalto combination – to have exactly these fields interacting in one university – is based on the belief that technology, science, and business are inherently, at least partly, aesthetic or artistic areas. We believe that this approach also helps to solve or ease social problems outside the organization itself. One example: The long-term and rather well-resourced collaboration between chemical engineering and fashion and textile design has produced completely new, much more sustainable textile materials and fashion creations that would never have been born without this collaboration. At the beginning, no one really knew what could come out of it, but soon, hopefully, experiments will also grow into economically sustainable businesses. (Ioncell, no date). This creates new jobs, reduces the need for very harmful cotton production, and offers new kinds of clothes and other products to wear and look at. This, again, will change the everyday aesthetics of many. Other types of examples come from, say, game design taken forward in the collaboration between Aalto's technical and visual specialists and gaming and technology companies such as SuperCell and Nvidia. Games, of course, form a major part of contemporary everyday life.

What is my role in this? It is not wise to underline any single actor's role, because these are joint efforts and one person cannot do much, and in most cases I have not personally been involved at all. Yet, there are some areas in which I hope I can contribute, for my minuscule part.

I can and must repeatedly remind my colleagues *that* aesthetic aspects in our processes and elsewhere are important. It is not self-evident that this is always taken into account, even if the basic principle is widely accepted. My task is also to remind others *why* they are important: They can, for example, improve well-being, help marketing, offer emotional gratification, open up creative new perspectives, and strengthen communities. In all these cases, they can contribute to solving social problems.

A somewhat different and more demanding task is to explicate *how* aesthetic aspects of objects and practices exist (what their ontological status is, to put it more technically), and how they function and can be approached: for example, through our senses, sometimes requiring conscious learning or developing of taste, relating to history in a certain way, spreading through social networks in surprising ways. Without understanding the complexity of such questions, we are walking on very thin ice, and this is exactly why the plurality of the field of aesthetics must be unfolded again and again.

I can also ask and urge my colleagues to provide different creative ideas and solutions in the way artists often do. Often, this happens when I am one expert in groups where we make decisions about various options with different aesthetic aspects and impacts: recruitment, buying art, campus development plans. Here, I can also help others to formulate their ideas, e.g, about what is art (art has different funding instruments, and it thus can be important to see clearly what should be categorized as art, and why and when). Sometimes there is a need to remind people that art is not *only* art, but that it has its political, technological, ecological, and many other aspects.

Moreover, I do not only help my colleagues, but also our external partners, including funders, to understand all this. I can try to do these things because I am trained as an aesthetician and I have practised for decades how to discuss such things. I have concepts, terminology and some analytical competence thanks to the philosophical nature of my education, and I have spent a lot of time with others who also have much expertise in these matters (artists, art students, critics, curators, fellow aestheticians, and so on). I have tried to develop my taste and my ability to speak for it – and I also appreciate other people’s taste, not just pushing my own through. My role is not to make artworks or other objects (I cannot do it), but I can help others to do that and to appreciate others’ aesthetic solutions. At least, I try to do my best.

All this is part of the professional skill set and knowledge that I am expected to use in this position. I was probably hired (partly) because the university leadership team needs aesthetic expertise. This fact, in itself, shows that the aesthetic is appreciated. I am fully aware that I am in a very privileged position and have many more possibilities to affect everyday aesthetics than many others, but I would still say that others also have possibilities to affect how we, as a community, take care of social problems and note our everyday aesthetic aspects.

Thinking about what a whole university can achieve over a long period of time through research and education, the impact of this kind of practical – or

applied, if you will – aesthetics is probably much greater than that of my own publications could ever be. ‘My’ aesthetics is partly realized in this job, affecting, hopefully, social problems and making them at least slightly more tolerable, that is, improving their aesthetic aspects.

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