

Breaking Aesthetic Boundaries

Arthur Danto, Yuriko Saito, and the Challenge to Western Aesthetic Thought

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This article examines how Arthur C. Danto and Yuriko Saito sought to expand the boundaries of aesthetics and art, challenging the inherited concepts of Western modernity. While Danto redefines art as an intellectual rather than a purely visual phenomenon, ultimately declaring *the end of art* to justify a pluralistic and self-reflective artistic landscape, Saito reclaims everyday life as a legitimate subject of aesthetic inquiry. Her approach challenges the separation between aesthetics and practice, demonstrating that aesthetic choices shape our surroundings, social relationships, and ethical commitments. By comparing these two perspectives, this article highlights the limitations of modern aesthetic paradigms, including Danto's. Furthermore, by examining the reductions imposed by modern aesthetic history, it argues that Saito's *Everyday Aesthetics* offers an alternative, transformative, and generative aesthetic framework—one capable of dismantling previous aesthetic barriers and opening new, underexplored paths for the discipline. More importantly, her approach possesses a profound transformative power, allowing individuals to engage with aesthetics in ways that shape both their perception of the world and their everyday lives. | *Keywords: Aesthetics, Everyday Aesthetics, Arthur Danto, Yuriko Saito, World-Making, Aesthetics of Care, Ethics and Aesthetics*

1. Introduction

Aesthetics and the philosophy of art underwent profound transformations throughout the twentieth century, primarily due to the crisis brought about by the historical avant-gardes, but also as a result of the emergence of new technological and reproductive media. For philosophers, it was not easy to account for these artistic changes or to develop theories capable of comprehensively addressing how works of art should be judged. This is why Arthur Danto became such a globally renowned figure: however controversial he may have been, he sought to explain the great shift that had taken place in the art world. Nevertheless, although the American philosopher succeeded in offering a universal definition of art (one valid for all times and places) he failed to recognize the biases and limitations embedded within his own framework.

In response to the Aesthetic field limitations, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, a new current known as Everyday Aesthetics has emerged, aiming to reclaim a broader perspective within the discipline. While several scholars have contributed to this approach, the philosopher who has most successfully established and disseminated it is the Japanese-American thinker Yuriko Saito. This article aims to compare and analyze how both thinkers expanded the fields of art and aesthetics, challenging the dominant narratives of their time and opening up new theoretical possibilities. To achieve this, the article is structured into two main parts. First, it examines the work of Arthur C. Danto, exploring his critique of the dominant conception of art within American aesthetics, his essentialist definition of art, and his famous proclamation of the *end of art*. Through this analysis, it will be shown how Danto redefines the concept of art and revitalizes Hegelian aesthetic thought, while also highlighting the limitations of his proposal, shaped by the assumptions of modern Western aesthetics.

The second part focuses on Yuriko Saito's radical expansion of aesthetics into the realm of the everyday. It examines how she challenges the modern separation between aesthetics and ethics, contemplation and practice, and artist and non-artist. Particular attention will be given to her emphasis on care as a fundamental aesthetic dimension – an idea that culminates in her book *Aesthetics of Care* (2022) and continues to shape her most recent work.

2. Expanding the Boundaries of Art – but How Far?

Arthur C. Danto is undoubtedly one of the key figures in twentieth-century philosophy of art. Lydia Goehr, professor at Columbia University and his departmental colleague, described him in her obituary as one of the four giants of the Anglo-American tradition, alongside Stanley Cavell, Nelson Goodman, and Richard Wollheim (2013). His legacy rests on three fundamental pillars: his challenge to the dominant conception of art within American aesthetics, his development of an expanded definition of art, and his famous proclamation of the *end of art*, through which he sought to account for the development of art history as a whole. For many years, he represented one of the most promising directions within Aesthetics, becoming one of the leading figures in the subdiscipline of the philosophy of art.

Despite his radical challenge to the historical and philosophical development of art, Danto did not entirely escape the conceptual frameworks of modern Western aesthetics. Undoubtedly, he managed to overcome the hegemonic theses of his time by proposing an essentialist definition of art and revitalising elements of Hegelian thought by presenting reflexivity as the culmination of contemporary art (Danto, 1981). However, his approach remained deeply influenced by a tradition that privileged the autonomy of art, the separation between the aesthetic and the practical, and a linear historical narrative. These limitations – some of which have been highlighted by Principe (2005, pp. 56–72) – demonstrate how his proposal, though innovative, remained tied to the very modernist assumptions it sought to transcend, as I will elaborate in this section.

During the 1960s, the Columbia professor was deeply engaged with questions of the philosophy of history.¹ However, in 1964, his trajectory took a significant turn after encountering Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* at the Stable Gallery in New York. These boxes, indistinguishable from those found in supermarkets, prompted him to ask a radical question: why were these considered art while their commercial counterparts were not (Danto, 1999, p. 126)? The philosopher had no immediate answer – nor did the aesthetic theories of his time. In the American context, aesthetics was largely dominated by neo-Wittgensteinian theories, which held that perception alone was sufficient to distinguish what was art from what was not, while also asserting that a definition of art was impossible, in reference to Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance" (Wittgenstein, 2002, §67).

Danto identified the problem of indiscernibles as a crucial philosophical starting point, arguing that art could not be determined solely through visual perception, and with this 'simple' idea, he revitalised the discussion in the Aesthetic field. In this case, the perceptual similarity between the two objects (Warhol's artwork and the commercial product) made it clear that the essence of art had to be located at the intellectual rather than the sensory level. For this reason, any definition of art had to account for this distinction. Warhol's work, in which there was no perceptual difference from the represented object, demonstrated for Danto that the essence of art could not be discovered at the level of perception but at the level of thought. This realisation made it necessary to change and expand aesthetic theory. That same year, he published the article *The Artworld* (1964). This term was later misinterpreted as a defense of the institutional theory of art. What Danto actually proposed was that art could not exist outside a cultural and theoretical context that conferred meaning upon it. As he would later clarify:

I am very grateful to them, and additionally grateful to those who have erected something called the Institutional Theory of Art on the analyses of 'The Artworld,' even if the theory itself is quite alien to anything I believe: one's children do not always quite come out as intended. I nevertheless, in classical Oedipal fashion, must do battle with my offspring, for I do not believe that the philosophy of art should yield herself to him I am said to have fathered. (Danto, 1981, p. viii)

Danto's proposal, however, was that the artworld is a dynamic interaction between artistic practice, aesthetic theories, and historical conditions. Since the artworld functions as a feedback loop between theory, history, and artistic practice, it inevitably evolves as these elements shift. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge that theories about the nature of art emerge within specific historical contexts, which explains why the definition of *art* has changed over time. At each moment, these theories have shaped how objects are perceived as *art*. This perspective helps explain how artifacts once regarded as mere utilitarian objects are now recognised as works of art and exhibited in

¹ For a more detailed discussion of how Danto's philosophy of history shapes his understanding of art, see Cascales (2024a). There, I argue that critics of narrativism have largely overlooked Danto's revival of the concept of narration, which is crucial for fully appreciating his end of art thesis.

museums and galleries. In this sense, as Alcaraz rightly points out, the notion of the *artworld* plays a dual role: “On the one hand, it is an ontological requirement for the existence of art and, on the other, it has an epistemological role in the identification and interpretation of works of art” (Alcaraz, 2006, p. 88). This framework explained how perceptually identical objects could have different ontologies depending on their artistic context. The *Brillo Boxes* exemplified this idea: they were considered art not because of their physical characteristics, but because they embodied a meaning that transcended their material appearance, challenging the separation between art and everyday life. However, in this article, Danto did not provide a definition of art that could include works like *Brillo Box* as art. It took more than two decades before he published *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Danto, 1981), where he articulated his famous definition.

Danto’s definition of art contains two necessary (though not sufficient) conditions: art must have a meaning, and this meaning must be embodied. The first condition is that the artwork must have content or significance, and the second is that this meaning must be embodied: “Something is a work of art when if it has a meaning – is about something – and when that meaning is embodied in the work” (Danto, 2013, p. 149). With this, the American philosopher sought to offer a universal definition, valid for all times and places. This definition proved highly valuable in overcoming the perceptual deadlock in which Aesthetics found itself at the time, providing a way to distinguish art from non-art. Ordinary objects or elements of nature simply exist, and we do not ask what they mean, whereas for works of art, it is essential to formulate their meaning. This meaningful condition of art is not an accessory part of the definition but an original one:

In seeking to distinguish art works from what I termed ‘mere real thing,’ I used *aboutness* as a principle of differentiation. It is a necessary condition for something to be an artwork that it be about something. Since something can possess aboutness without being art, more than content is accordingly needed to distinguish the artwork from mere real things. (Danto, 2003, pp. 65–66)

The second necessary condition is that meaning must be embodied. This condition reveals that referentiality is not merely a description or allusion to something else but rather a particular way of speaking about something. More precisely, Danto alludes to the sensible manifestation of the idea presented by Hegel; that is to say, he understands the notion of incarnation in the same way Hegel understood the symbol: “It consists of giving sensuous or material embodiment to what Hegel would certainly have called Idea: it is Idea made flesh, so to speak, and accordingly involves a special kind of understanding” (Danto, 1992, p. 62).

Danto refers to the embodiment of meaning as the coincidence of content and the mode of representation found in this Hegelian passage. Understanding a work of art as a symbol helps clarify how an artist’s ideas, concepts, and thoughts can be sensibly embodied in a material work. Thus, art’s eidetic character and materiality can never be separated. Works of art, therefore, are not merely characterized by having meaning, since objects that are not

artworks may also possess this trait. It is precisely this emphasis on embodiment that situates a work of art within a historical context and a specific Artworld.

Danto achieved two significant outcomes with this definition of the necessary conditions for art. First, he provided a crucial tool for aestheticians: the open concept of art allowed for the revision of various aesthetic theories and the recognition of previously excluded artworks.² Second, he concluded that art had reached its culmination, which led him to proclaim its *end*. As I have argued elsewhere (Cascales, 2019), what the American philosopher meant was that the history of art and aesthetics, as narrated from Plato to Vasari to Greenberg, had come to an end. Thanks to Warhol – and, admittedly, to himself – there was a newfound awareness that what mattered in art was not mimesis. Art had reached a stage of reflexivity, freeing itself from the philosophical and narrative constraints that had subjugated it for centuries (Danto, 1999, p. 126). This reflexivity enabled art to emancipate itself from its dependence on other disciplines, including philosophy.

Although the thesis of the end of art heralded a post-historical stage dominated by plurality, it is now worth highlighting the extent to which this vision was influenced by Danto's Hegelian reading (Principe, 2005, p. 58). Danto did not adopt Hegel's system in its entirety, but he employed key aspects such as historical progress and self-consciousness, which led him to interpret the development of art history in a very particular way – one that merits further scrutiny, as I will explore below.

3. Beyond the End of Art

Danto's definition of art was enthusiastically received, as it provided a theoretical framework broad enough to accommodate the increasingly diverse range of artistic practices emerging in the 20th century. In so doing, Danto's proposal not only expanded the boundaries of what could be considered art, but also catalysed new debates and critical reflections, effectively revitalising aesthetic theory. As a result, many philosophers, critics, and artists who had found themselves at an impasse could move forward, engaging in deeper inquiries and innovative approaches to understanding the nature and purpose of art and aesthetics. Likewise, the proclamation of the *end of art* resonated globally, offering a new interpretative horizon, though it was not without criticism and challenges. It now seems pertinent to highlight these critiques to demonstrate that his theories did not, in the end, expand the concept of art as much as it initially seemed.

Long ago, David Carrier identified a paradox in Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, noting that their exhibition at a specific historical moment revealed the essence of art, much in the same way that other moments in history have uncovered the nature of action or knowledge (Carrier, 1998, p. 13). Meanwhile, Noël Carroll

² Indeed, he considers the aesthetic aspects in everyday actions, as “selecting garments or choosing sexual partners or picking a dog out of a litter or an apple out of a display of apples” (Danto, 2003, p. 7). However, as we will see, he established a clear separation between art and non-art objects.

raised objections to Danto's concept of *aboutness*, arguing that it was too exclusive. He contended that objects of design, such as sports cars, could also possess *aboutness*, as they convey meaning through their lines and forms – designed not only to facilitate speed but to explicitly connote it. However, the example Carroll uses to challenge Danto's definition is revealing: the *real Brillo Boxes*. According to Carroll, these boxes have a subject – Brillo – and their embodiment in a carefully selected iconography conveys meaningful content: “Brillo is clean, bright, modern, and associated with freshness, dynamism, and vitality. Perhaps its red, white, and blue colour scheme associates it with ‘American cleanliness’” (Carroll, 2021, p. 72). This argument, though provocative, does not entirely dismantle Danto's vision. Instead, it highlights the complexities of the relationship between meaning, embodiment, and context.

In her latest book, Lydia Goehr underscores another critical aspect of Danto's system: the inherent circularity of his theory. According to Goehr, it is not the declaration that turns an object into a work of art; rather, “the declaration merely follows the fact that the work is already art.” Thus, what seemed to collapse the boundary between art and everyday objects actually reaffirms the solidity of that boundary: “The work that appeared to tear down the wall between artworks and common things only demonstrated that the ontological wall remained standing and could not collapse” (Goehr, 2022, p. 23). On this point, Principe (2005, p. 65) had already observed that while Danto attempts to explain how objects from everyday life become works of art, the boundary between them remains inseparable.

A logical response to these criticisms might be to advocate for an expansion of the boundaries of the artworld to include greater plurality, as thinkers like Jacques Rancière have proposed. However, the issue is not simply to extend the category of art to encompass other realities, such as design objects, but rather to examine the demands that Aesthetics imposes upon everyday objects. These demands include an intentional process of purification that design objects, by their very functional nature, cannot afford. Furthermore, we must recognise how the title of Danto's book, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, points to the transformation that everyday objects undergo in order to be understood as art. That is to say, what truly matters happens *after* the transfiguration – when the object is already comprehended and appreciated as art.

In continuity with Rancière, Fernando Infante argues that the problem does not lie in whether design objects meet the formal characteristics or autonomy required by Aesthetics, but rather in how this discipline establishes criteria that systematically exclude design from the category of art. According to Infante, Aesthetics demands “the necessity of possessing an almost complete autonomy in order to be considered a bearer of meaning, experimentation, reflection, sublimity, exceptionality, or any of the values with which the aesthetic discipline defines works of art” (Infante, 2018, pp. 29–30).

Far from advocating for an expansion of Aesthetics to include design, Infante suggests a critical reflection on the aesthetic system itself. The goal is not to

claim the category of art for design – an approach that would merely reinforce existing structures – but rather to question these structures and the assumptions that sustain them. According to Infante, the key lies in “challenging Aesthetics by taking design as a reference point” in order to dismantle “its moral component, which manifests as a rejection of the modern ills of industry and consumption from a position of legitimacy grounded in truth and goodness, leading Aesthetics to project its ethical dimension in a doctrinal manner” (Infante, 2018, p. 71).

This critical stance does not seek to erase the distinctions between art and design but rather to expose how these distinctions are deeply embedded in a normative system that deserves reconsideration. In this sense, the debate on Danto’s system, its limits, and its implications not only sheds light on the tensions inherent in contemporary Aesthetics but also compels us to seek new ways to account for the relationship between art and life. As I will argue in the following section, I believe that the Aesthetics of the Everyday offers a more viable path out of the attempt to expand the notion of art in order to encompass life – precisely because this approach is grounded in different premises. Specifically, I will focus on the figure and thought of Yuriko Saito, the leading exponent of an aesthetic framework that successfully accounts for both everyday reality and art, without diminishing either sphere.

4. The True Expansion of Aesthetics and the Recovery of the Everyday

Everyday Aesthetics has gained prominence in recent decades as an expansive and inclusive subdiscipline within aesthetics. Its primary goal is to address aspects of daily life that have been largely overlooked by aesthetic theory due to its overwhelming focus on art. This approach does not seek to negate existing frameworks but rather to reclaim what has been forgotten, bringing to light aesthetic phenomena in everyday life that, despite having been long marginalised, possess intrinsic richness. These phenomena include not only objects but also seemingly mundane daily activities, such as doing laundry, having a cup of coffee, or taking out the trash. This perspective does not reject artistic experiences or the sublime; rather, it seeks to highlight how daily life is imbued with aesthetic value and how this can shape our quality of life, our social interactions, and our environment (Godoy, 2023, p. 177).

Since its emergence in the early 2000s, Everyday Aesthetics has been the subject of extensive philosophical inquiry. Among its pioneering figures is Kevin Melchionne, who highlights that although some everyday experiences can attain an intensity comparable to artistic appreciation, the concept of “continuity” applies strictly within Everyday Aesthetic engagements themselves rather than bridging them with art-centered experiences. In one of his articles, for instance, Melchionne argues that repeated, habitual interactions – such as home organisation or routine leisure activities – can foster deep aesthetic value in daily life (Melchionne, 2011, p. 440). Later, in *The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics* (2013), he develops this position further, underscoring a radical discontinuity between everyday and artistic aesthetics. By showing that each domain possesses its own distinct modes of appreciation, Melchionne challenges the

notion of a single continuum that collapses ordinary experience into the sphere of art, thereby affirming the philosophical significance of the aesthetic dimension in daily life on its own terms.

Another key work in this field is *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* by Thomas Leddy (2012), whose understanding of Everyday Aesthetics serves as an intermediate step between Danto and Saito. In applying an artistic notion like *aura* to everyday objects, Leddy arguably aligns more closely with Danto's willingness to treat ordinary things as potential art. At the same time, by keeping this *aura* less intense than traditional aesthetic categories, his position diverges from Saito's view, which seeks to explain everyday experiences largely without invoking art-centric frameworks. Building on this idea, Leddy contends that although functional, everyday objects can acquire an *aura* similar to that found in artworks, its intensity remains relatively low. As he puts it, "an aesthetic property is one in which the aesthetic object adopts an 'aura' within an experience" (Leddy, 2012a, p. 128) and "includes an aura of heightened significance but at a lower intensity than found in the beautiful, and a much lower level than found in the sublime" (Leddy, 2012b). In this way, Leddy acknowledges an exceptional dimension within daily experiences, while still distinguishing them from more traditional artistic forms – thus subtly bridging the gap between Danto's stronger artistic orientation and Saito's broader emphasis on ordinary life.

Precisely because Leddy posits that everyday experience must attain an exceptional quality to be considered aesthetically relevant, his perspective has been classified as the *weak variant* of Everyday Aesthetics (Dowling, 2010; Shusterman, 2010; Godoy, 2021b).³ This requirement of a lesser yet still notable *aura* effectively situates Leddy's approach somewhere between a purely art-focused aesthetic theory and Saito's more inclusive framework centred on the ordinary.

However, the scholar who has most successfully developed and disseminated this subdiscipline is Yuriko Saito. The Japanese-American philosopher has emerged as one of the most influential voices in Everyday Aesthetics, challenging the dominant narratives of modern Western aesthetics, particularly those of the 20th-century Anglo-American tradition (2012, p. 36). According to Saito, everyday life has been historically overlooked by aesthetic theory because it has been primarily concerned with the extraordinary:

The presumed separation of an object's function and its aesthetic value goes back to the eighteenth-century proposal of disinterestedness as the distinguishing mark of the aesthetic. In one sense, the development of modern Western aesthetics can be characterized as a declaration of independence for the aesthetic, emancipating it from the grip of the moral, the conceptual, and the practical. With some exceptions along the way, I believe that aesthetic discourse is still generally guided by this project to secure independence of the aesthetic. (Saito, 2007, p. 211)

³ After all, if the everyday is of interest to aesthetics only insofar as it becomes extraordinary, it paradoxically ceases to be everyday – a contradiction that Pradier (2025, pp. 51–76) has also highlighted.

Saito frequently critiques how aesthetics has historically centred aesthetic experience on the artistic object, leading to a passive conception of both contemplation and action. However, the precise mechanisms by which this narrowing of focus occurred are not always explicitly addressed. I will therefore provide an overview of how this reduction came about.

First, in her seminal work, Saito argues against the modern Western aesthetic tradition, contending that it is excessively centred on art and on extraordinary experiences. Although she reiterates this idea, it requires a more nuanced treatment than what she typically provides in her writings, where she mainly references Kant. Originally, aesthetic inquiry was driven by the desire to understand and appreciate reality. In this sense, it was initially closely linked to the sensory, as illustrated by Alexander Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750), and therefore more closely tied to our everyday perceptual experiences than Saito suggests (2007, pp. 11–13; 2017, pp. 1–4).

That said, it is true that the field gradually began to focus on more extraordinary events, but we need to understand why. One of the main figures responsible for this shift was David Hume. In his essay *Of the Standard of Taste* (1757), where he reflects on appreciating a glass of wine, he established *taste* as the fundamental criterion of aesthetic judgment. According to Hume, taste is an innate and universal faculty that enables individuals to discern beauty, though its exercise is shaped by cultural and educational factors. In Hume's view, however, taste operates passively, centering on the contemplation of artistic and aesthetic objects specifically intended to evoke pleasure. For this reason, the Anglo-American aesthetic tradition that followed Hume – drawing on thinkers such as Hutcheson and Burke – began placing increasing emphasis on individual and psychological dimensions, ultimately steering aesthetics toward a subjectivist and passive approach. While Baumgarten is credited with coining the term *aesthetics*, Kant is broadly recognised as the father of modern aesthetics, having established the main criteria for aesthetic judgement (Mandoki, 2007, pp. 7–14).

Despite Kant's attempt, in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), to develop a framework for aesthetically judging reality, his theories ultimately led to a narrowing of the discipline. This reduction arises from his claim that aesthetic judgment must be *disinterested*, meaning detached from any practical purpose or utility. As a result, aesthetics came to be conceived as an autonomous sphere, separate from both everyday life and human needs (Mandoki, 2007, pp. 17–18). Although Kant did not expressly limit aesthetic reflection to works of art, the criteria he proposed led many interpreters to focus primarily on artworks and on the genius as the artist-creator. This perspective was further solidified by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835), elevated art to the highest expression of the human spirit. For Hegel, fully developed art surpasses even the beauty of nature, serving as a conduit for the manifestation of spirit. In this framework, artists are viewed as geniuses who act as intermediaries between the divine and the human, and art is seen as the culmination of a historical process that finds its fullest realisation in the fine arts, regarded as the supreme expressions of human freedom and creativity (Cascales, 2022).

Thus, alongside the rise of salons, art criticism, and the proliferation of artistic institutions, it became almost inevitable for aesthetics to focus more and more on the extraordinary, thereby neglecting the aesthetic value of ordinary domains, objects, and actions. Nevertheless, in the spirit of fairness, it is important to recognise those who forged an alternative path.

The first author (often mentioned by Saito) is Friedrich Nietzsche. Although not typically identified primarily as an aesthetician, Nietzsche introduced a perspective that elevated life itself into a realm of aesthetic creation. His reflections on self-fashioning and the cultivation of personal style – evident in works like *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and *The Gay Science* (1882) – shifted the focus from discrete artworks to the possibility that one's entire existence could be treated as an artistic project. This emphasis on lived experience as a creative endeavour anticipated later discussions about everyday life's aesthetic dimensions. The concern with how one ought to live resonates in Simone Weil's (2002) thought, whose reflections on attention suggest that a contemplative openness to our immediate surroundings – whether in daily routines or the workplace – can disclose profound aesthetic depth in the seemingly mundane (Cascales, 2024b). On the other hand, from the 1960s, the Italian thinker Gillo Dorfles argued that aesthetics should not be confined to the study of beauty or artistic genius but should also engage with the ordinary objects, behaviours, and rituals that shape daily life. His exploration of everyday aesthetics (*l'estetica del quotidiano*) led him to analyse phenomena as diverse as slang, advertising, industrial design, popular dance, and fashion (domains traditionally excluded from philosophical aesthetics). By doing so, he challenged the distinction between high and low culture and proposed a more dynamic, interdisciplinary approach to aesthetic inquiry (Infante del Rosal, 2025).

A second lineage of thought emerges in the United States with George Santayana. In *The Sense of Beauty* (1896), he similarly argues that aesthetic appreciation arises from our emotional and sensory engagement with the broader world, rather than being confined to the works of *genius*. Subsequently, in *Art as Experience* (1934), John Dewey famously challenges the museum-centric view by emphasizing the continuity between aesthetic perception and the ordinary practices that shape communal life, suggesting that cooking, conversation, and play could all harbour aesthetic depth if approached with awareness and care (Luque, 2019, pp. 132–133). More recently, as I have shown before, I think we can include Arthur Danto, who sought to expand the concept of art beyond its traditional boundaries. His well-known analysis of Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* questioned the criteria that separate fine art from everyday objects, ultimately arguing that anything could become art under the right interpretive framework.⁴

Taken together, these thinkers broadened the scope of aesthetic inquiry well beyond formalized institutions and singular works of art. Whether through the idea of life as an artistic project, a revaluation of seemingly ordinary

⁴ This genealogy could indeed be extended further, as Haapala suggests, by incorporating contemporary authors such as Richard Shusterman and Ossi Naukkarinen, who emphasize the human and bodily dimensions of aesthetic experience (Haapala, 2005, pp. 39–40).

experiences, or a deliberate questioning of what counts as art in the first place, they all helped lay the conceptual groundwork for present-day explorations into the aesthetics of everyday life.

Nevertheless, as Saito argues in all her works, “despite the recent inclusion of nature, popular culture, and other aspects of our daily life, the core subject matter of philosophical aesthetics seems to remain Western fine arts” (Saito, 2007, p. 11). Therefore, we need to analyse her perspective more deeply. I especially want to contrast her arguments with those previously set forth by modern Western thinkers regarding the nature of aesthetic perception, the artist’s role, the conception of beauty, or the history of art.

In this regard, according to Saito, aesthetic perception is not a passive faculty, as Godoy (2021a, p. 788) also argues, but rather an active tool that shapes our daily decisions and structures the world we inhabit. This expanded perspective underscores the ethical implications of our aesthetic choices – such as the arrangement of objects in a room or the way we interact with our environment. By taking this stance, Saito challenges the traditional Humean perspective, emphasising that aesthetic judgment is not merely a matter of individual pleasure but an act that extends beyond the self and considers its impact on others. For this reason, aesthetic judgment is not divorced from utility or ethics (Godoy, 2021a, pp. 789–801).

In contrast to the traditional emphasis on artistic genius, the Japanese-American philosopher argues that we are all *world-makers*. Aesthetic concerns affect us all, and we actively shape the world aesthetically – an idea she develops extensively in *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and World-Making* (Saito, 2017). In this way, Saito expands the scope of aesthetic judgment by integrating it with the practical and ethical dimensions of daily life, breaking away from the Kantian separation between aesthetics and functionality. Her proposal not only broadens the field of aesthetics but also underscores the responsibility of each individual as a *world-maker* – a creator of a world shaped by aesthetic choices that, though seemingly ordinary, have a profound and transformative impact.

At the same time, whereas Kantian aesthetics was largely structured around the categories of beauty and the sublime, Saito calls for an expansion of aesthetic categories to better account for everyday realities. In this regard, she also opposes Leddy, who believes that all such categories can ultimately be subsumed under the established ones (Leddy, 2012b). Saito, by contrast, argues that Everyday Aesthetics is more complex, as its categories depend on context, are shaped by everyone (not just a select few, as in art), and carry significance not only aesthetically but also in moral, social, political, and ecological dimensions (Saito, 2007, pp. 152–153).

Rather than merely broadening aesthetic concepts, Saito seeks to move beyond a Hegelian, history-bound framework and to incorporate categories from other cultural traditions – ones that modern Western aesthetics has often dismissed or excluded from the pale of history, as Danto would put it. In her work, she draws on Japanese aesthetic concepts such as *wabi-sabi* (beauty in

imperfection) and *kintsugi* (highlighting the beauty of scars) to demonstrate that alternative aesthetic models not only exist but also deserve recognition, even if they do not align with canonical Western categories (Fernández-Gómez, 2025). Moreover, these are not the only traditions worth recovering; many other cultures offer aesthetic insights that challenge the assumptions of modern aesthetics and invite a more pluralistic and inclusive understanding of aesthetic experience.

Lastly, while Arthur Danto proclaims the *end of art* as the result of a historical process culminating in art's self-awareness of its own nature, Yuriko Saito's *Everyday Aesthetics* challenges the idea that aesthetics must be bound to a linear historical progression or a final culmination. In Danto's framework, art reaches its point of maximum self-reflection, no longer requiring teleological development. However, this claim presupposes a modernist trajectory, where art evolves towards conceptual self-awareness as its ultimate goal. Saito, in contrast, shifts the focus away from art's internal history to the aesthetic dimensions of everyday life, which do not follow a singular historical narrative but rather emerge from embodied, contextual experiences that shape human existence beyond the realm of artistic production.

Furthermore, Saito's approach offers an alternative and expands the scope of aesthetic inquiry beyond Danto's intellectualised framework. While Danto successfully dismantled the retinal conception of art, emphasising its conceptual and interpretative dimensions, his theory remains grounded in a cognitive and philosophical analysis of artistic meaning. Saito, on the other hand, advocates for a holistic aesthetic engagement that incorporates not only intellectual and visual aspects but also embodied, multisensory, and affective dimensions. For Saito, aesthetic perception is not a detached act of contemplation but an active process that involves the whole body and all the senses,⁵ shaping our interactions with objects, spaces, and daily experiences. In this sense, while Danto's aesthetics remains anchored in the artworld and its historical development, Saito decentralises aesthetics, demonstrating that aesthetic experience is deeply embedded in how we inhabit and perceive the world.

By contrast, *Everyday Aesthetics* does not commit to a single point of origin; rather, it embraces multiple perspectives, incorporating influences from different traditions, cultures, and disciplines. From this perspective, Saito's proposal represents not merely an expansion of the field of aesthetics but a fundamental reconfiguration of its boundaries, opening the debate to an aesthetics that is not defined by a historicist narrative. At the same time, Saito's approach to *Everyday Aesthetics* also engages with other contemporary philosophical and sociocultural currents, broadening its relevance in current debates. Furthermore, the way in which she does so has allowed for the re-establishment of bridges with disciplines such as ethics and political philosophy – connections that have long been seen as controversial due to the very structure of Aesthetics as a discipline.

⁵ In this regard, her perspective aligns with Richard Shusterman's (2012; 2013) somaesthetic approach, which emphasizes the role of the body in aesthetic experience.

5. A Truly Comprehensive Aesthetic Proposal

The Japanese-American philosopher Yuriko Saito is one of the most influential figures in contemporary aesthetics, expanding the discipline's horizons beyond art and passive contemplation and proposing a profound connection between the aesthetic, the ethical, and the everyday. Her work not only challenges the traditional notions established by modern Western aesthetics but also redefines our relationship with the world, revealing how our daily aesthetic choices shape not only our environment but also our social relationships and ethical impact.

Since *Everyday Aesthetics* (2007), Saito has critically examined the legacy of modern Western aesthetics, characterised by its focus on art as the pinnacle of aesthetic experience and its detachment from the practical dimensions of life. According to Saito, the aesthetic dimension of daily life is not limited to individual pleasure or the pursuit of beauty; rather, it functions as an active tool that guides our actions and decisions. As she states in her work, our “attitudes, choices, and actions, seemingly innocuous and inconsequential, are guided by aesthetic considerations” and have significant consequences for our quality of life and society as a whole (Saito, 2012, p. 263). This implies that aesthetics is not an isolated domain but a practice that shapes how we interact with our surroundings and with those around us.

Saito also highlights the social and political power of the aesthetic, demonstrating how aesthetic decisions can reinforce hierarchies or promote inclusion. From the design of public spaces to the arrangement of a room, our choices not only express individual values but also influence social dynamics. This relational dimension of aesthetics becomes a powerful tool for building a more equitable and sustainable world, while also underscoring the need to develop an *aesthetic literacy* that allows us to become more aware of how our choices shape the world.

By articulating this interconnection between aesthetics and ethics, Saito redefines the notion of *aesthetic responsibility*. For her, it is not simply about making choices that are “beautiful” or “pretty” in a superficial sense, as Gilles Lipovetsky critiques in his notion of the *world's aestheticization* (Lipovetsky, Serroy, 2013), or as Byung-Chul Han (2018) describes in his concept of the ‘polished’ aesthetic that dominates contemporary culture. While these critiques are relevant in the era of artistic capitalism, they remain distant from Saito's proposal, as her concept of the aesthetic extends beyond surface appearance or empty formalism. Her vision of aesthetics is inseparable from an active engagement with the world – an integrated practice within the daily actions that shape our existence.

The logical culmination of this ethical-aesthetic approach is what Saito develops in her most recent work, *Aesthetics of Care* (2022). In this book, she explores how aesthetic experiences can foster a sense of care and responsibility toward both the material world and other people. This concept, inspired by the ethics of care developed by Carol Gilligan (1984), underscores that aesthetic sensibilities are not merely reflections of ethical values but also have the power to shape them.

According to Saito, care for the material world is not limited to preventing its deterioration but involves an active relationship of maintenance and attention, embracing wear and imperfections as part of an object's history and our connection to it. Aesthetic care, as Saito presents it, is not reducible to purely functional actions; rather, it is a way of affirming our interdependence with the world. Activities such as cleaning, repairing, or preserving become aesthetic expressions of respect and commitment. This dimension of care, often overlooked in the aesthetic tradition, is fundamental for maintaining harmony in our environments and strengthening our connections with others. Ultimately, the aesthetics of care proposed by the Japanese-American philosopher not only transforms our perception of everyday tasks but also expands the scope of aesthetics into ethical and existential territory. By integrating care as an essential dimension of aesthetic experience, Saito invites us to reconsider how we live our lives and how our daily actions can contribute to a more just, balanced, and meaningful world.

6. Conclusion: Towards a Transformed and Transformative Aesthetics

The comparison between Arthur C. Danto and Yuriko Saito has highlighted two complementary ways of expanding the boundaries of art and aesthetics, both of which challenge the inherited conceptions of Western modernity. Although both thinkers share the objective of moving beyond traditional aesthetic categories, their emphasis on opposite aspects leads to two markedly different theories.

With his philosophy of art, Danto successfully broadened the concept of art, demonstrating that it is not merely a visual phenomenon but also an intellectual one. His proclamation of the *end of art* justified the opening up of art to a plurality of styles and forms, liberating it from teleological narratives. However, as we have argued, his conceptual framework remains rooted in the premises of modern aesthetics, such as the centrality of the spectator and the autonomy of art. These foundations, while expanding art's theoretical scope, also limit his capacity to integrate ethical and everyday dimensions into his analysis.

Saito, on the other hand, offers a radically different perspective by shifting the focus from art to everyday life. Her approach challenges the modern separation between aesthetics and practice, demonstrating how our daily aesthetic choices have a direct impact on our personal lives, social relationships, and material environment. The notion of *world-making*, central to her work, democratizes aesthetics by recognising that we all participate in shaping the world through our everyday decisions. Furthermore, Saito compels us to reconsider the role of ethics in aesthetics, culminating in her aesthetics of care, which emphasizes the importance of maintenance, repair, and attentiveness toward the world we inhabit.

By bringing these two authors into dialogue, we do not merely expand our understanding of the aesthetic and the artistic; we also pave the way for a transformative aesthetics, one that invites us to integrate aesthetic awareness into all aspects of our daily lives. This approach not only enriches

our perception of the world but also reaffirms the idea that aesthetics is not a passive or isolated domain, but rather an active force that shapes our lived experience. By moving beyond the traditional opposition between art and everyday life, between contemplation and action, this perspective offers a solid foundation for future work in aesthetics, one that allows us not only to understand the world but also to inhabit it more meaningfully.

This publication is part of the research project PID2023-153253NA-I00, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (MCIN), the State Research Agency (AEI/10.13039/501100011033), and the European Union (FEDER).

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15870455