

# Aesthetic Crossroads 2

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# Adorno v Československu: hudba, teória, estetika

Vladimír Fulka

The aim of this paper is to examine how Adorno's aesthetic and musicological thinking was received in Czech and Slovak musicology in the decades between the 60s and the 80s. The focus is on the Czech and Slovak translation of some of Adorno's musicological treatises and lectures – especially those concerning his views on the Second Vienna School and the musical poetics of its immediate successors – which were published in former Czechoslovakia. The study offers an interesting perspective on Adorno's relatively unknown lecture *Form der neuen Musik* (1965) and its related, although not identical, Czech version *Formové princípy súčasnej hudby* [Formal Principles of Contemporary Music] (1966) as well as on his discussion with some Slovak composers and musicologists published as *Dnes je možné iba radikálne kritické myslenie* [Today, Only Radical Critical Thinking is Possible] (1967). The study also considers other scientific texts by Adorno in relation to the above-mentioned translations of his works. The analysis, reflection, and interpretation of Adorno's works in former Czechoslovakia, as well as their contemporary reception, turn out to be sporadic in the examined period. The purpose of this research is to revive awareness of their significance and to give a new impulse to their reassessment within the current musicological and philosophical reflection. | Keywords: *Dodecaphony, Serialism, Atonality, Non-Formal Music, Aleatoric Music, Neoclassicism*

## 1 Adornove darmstadtské a iné prednášky o novej hudbe v českej a slovenskej muzikologickej publicistike

Na základe dlhodobého bádania bolo cieľom našich prechádzajúcich publikovaných textov medzi rokmi 2014 – 2020 predstaviť spektrum tém, ktoré do svojej filozofie hudby zahrnul Th. W. Adorno, vyjadrujúc sa k otázkam hudobnej sociológie, hudobnej filozofie, hudobnej estetiky a literatúry (pozri bližšie Fulka 2014a, 2014b, 2020). Uplatnili sme pritom širší esteticko-filozofický rámec alebo kontext témy daný Adornovou príslušnosťou ku marxistickej Frankfurtskej filozofickej škole. Táto optika umožnila pomerne koncízne zhodnotiť texty sprístupnené v češtine a slovenčine a ich recepciu

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v Československu od 60. rokov 20. storočia po osemdesiate roky 20. storočia. Súčasťou oboznámenosti s teoretickými prácami Adorna bola aj čiastočne „negatívna“ reakcia na jeho myšlienky. Navonok sa prejavovala ako paušálne odmietavá kritika ovplyvnená marxisticko-leninskou filozofiou resp. súdobými politicko-kultúrnymi podmienkami a z nich vyplývajúcimi obmedzeniami v slobode vedeckej tvorby a vyjadrovania myšlienok.

V nasledujúcich úvahách sa sústreďujeme na Adornove muzikologické texty resp. publikované prednášky, ktoré boli preložené do českého alebo slovenského jazyka a publikované v muzikologických časopisoch v 60. – 80. rokoch 20. storočia.<sup>1</sup> Na povojnových kurzoch súčasnej hudby v Darmstadte-Kranichsteine bol Adorno vnímaný ako veľká autorita. Impulz k jeho pozvaniu prišiel od francúzskeho skladateľa seriálnej hudby René Leibowitza. Adorno sa zúčastnil na darmstadtských kurzoch v období medzi rokmi 1950 a 1966 osemkrát a predniesol tam dovedna päť prednášok (Adorno 2014).<sup>2</sup> V českej a slovenskej publicistike boli z týchto prednášok publikované v preklade pôvodné lektúry o Druhej viedenskej škole a serializme, o hudobných formach, ale aj o perspektívach novej hudby.

Adornov status v Darmstadte bol však ambivalentný, ba až paradoxný. Adorno bol svojou estetikou avantgardy inšpirátorom vzniku darmstadtských kurzov novej hudby. Implikáciami Adornovej estetiky u P. Bouleza a K. Stockhausena bolo zavrnutie tradície v hudbe *en bloc*, ale Adorno s ich radikalizmom nesúhlasil. Voči seriálnej hudbe bol ostro kritický, ale voči hlavným protagonistom Darmstadtu prejavoval aj rešpekt a uznanie, hoci ich hudba bola akoby za hranicami jeho 'hudobného kozmu'. V záhlaví Adornovej eseje *Form in der neuen Musik* je venovanie práve P. Boulezovi (*Für Pierre Boulez*), hoci sa tu nevyhýba ani kritickejšiemu hodnoteniu mladého francúzskeho skladateľa. Kritický postoj k seriálnej hudbe zaujal Adorno aj vo svojej bratislavskej prednáške *Formové princípy súčasnej hudby* (1966), kde sa odvolal na svoju povestnú prednášku *Vom Altern der neuen Musik* (*O starnutí novej hudby*, 1954). Tá však neodznala v rámci darmstadtských kurzov, ale v hessenskom rozhlase v roku 1954 (Adorno 1958). Prednáška proti seriálnej avantgarde vyvolala v Darmstadte búrlivé reakcie.<sup>3</sup> U nás bola prakticky neznáma. Jej význam spočíval v tom, že bola prvým sformulovaným prejavom Adornovho esteticko-filozofického sporu o serializmus v Darmstadte.<sup>4</sup> Podobne, rozsiahla darmstadtská prednáška *Kriterien der neuen Musik* (*Kritériá novej hudby*, 1957) publikovaná len v nemčine (Adorno 1997h), vytvára možné doplnujúce

<sup>1</sup> Ide najmä o tzv. darmstadtské prednášky, ale aj prednášky, ktoré sa realizovali priamo v Československu.

<sup>2</sup> Konkrétne ide o prednášky: *Der junge Schönberg* (1955), *Schönbergs Kontrapunkt* (1956), *Kriterien der neuen Musik* (1957), *Vers une musique informelle* (1961), *Funktion der Farbe in der Musik* (1966).

<sup>3</sup> Adornovo vystúpenia v Darmstadte svedčia o tom, že darmstadtská hudobná avantgarda bola rozporuplným a nie bez výhrad prijímaným kultúrnym fenoménom.

<sup>4</sup> O to prekvapivejšie je, že u výborne jazykovo vybavených československých muzikológov (najmä čo sa týka nemeckého jazyka považovaného za ligu franca socialistického tábora) prešla bez povšimnutia, navyše, ak vieme doložiť, že v slovenčine publikovaných Adornových textoch bola zmienaná, napr. v bratislavskej prednáške.

kontexty s témami prednášok zverejnenými v prekladoch v Československu vo vymedzenom období.

Z hľadiska predmetu nášho záujmu špecifické postavenie má darmstadtská prednáška *Form in der neuen Musik* (1966) (pozri Adorno 1966, 1997e). Neodznala však na darmstadtských seminároch, ale v rámci vedeckého sympózia realizovaného v Darmstadte v roku 1965.<sup>5</sup> Jej názov je takmer zhodný s prednáškou *Formové princípy súčasnej hudby* v Bratislave v roku 1966 a bola publikovaná v rovnakom roku ako Adornova pôvodná nemecká prednáška. Adornova prednáška v Darmstadte bola zrejme predlohou bratislavskej prednášky, aj keď oba texty nie sú celkom totožné.

Za veľmi vplyvný vedecký text publikovaný v Československu možno považovať aj český preklad Adornovho programového estetického manifestu *Vers une musique informelle* (*K neformálnej hudbe*, 1960). Do tematického okruhu lektúr publikovaných u nás patrí prednáška *O niektorých ťažkostiach pri komponovaní hudby v súčasnosti* (Adorno 1965a), pôvodne štúdia s názvom *Schwierigkeiten I. Beim Komponieren* (Adorno 1965b), ktorá však nie je darmstadtskou prednáškou, ale rozhlasovou prednáškou, ktorá odznala v brémskom rozhlase (porov. Adorno 1965c, 1997i). Z Adornových prednášok boli teda preložené a publikované u nás celkovo iba dve: v češtine *Vers une musique informelle*, pod pôvodným názvom a dedikáciou v českom jazyku vo forme podnadpisu *Památke Wolfganga Steineckeho* (Adorno 1970b) a v slovenčine *O niektorých ťažkostiach pri komponovaní hudby v súčasnosti* (Adorno 1965a). Nemožno ich však obísť v súvislosti s darmstadtskými prednáškami, pretože s nimi kontextovo organicky súvisia.

## 2 Adornova prednáška *Vers une musique informelle*

Manifest *Vers une musique informelle* (*K neformálnej hudbe*, 1960) má medzi Adornovými textami o seriálnej, avantgardnej a aleatorickej hudbe podobný status ako text *Vom Altern der neuen Musik* (1954). Je to vášnivá a osobne zaujatá polemika s novou hudbou a s jej bytostnou podstatou, v protiklade s vecnými a nezainteresovanými technickými analýzami v muzikologickej literatúre.<sup>6</sup>

Esej-manifest-prednáška *Vers une musique informelle* pôvodne odznala už v roku 1961. Je to jeden zo súdobo najdiskutovanejších textov neskorého Adorna. Pojem *musique informelle*, ktorý Adorno adaptoval z moderného maliarstva (*art informelle*), bol potom použitý najmä v štúdiách o A. Bergovi. Symbolické francúzke pomenovanie nemeckého manifestu bolo zo strany Adorna symbolickým gestom a holdom francúzskej kultúre, prezentovaný ako „malý projev díku zemi, v níž tradice avantgardy je zajedno s občanskou odvahou k manifestu.“ (Adorno 1970b, s. 8–9) Všetky Adornove darmstadtské

<sup>5</sup> Zborník *Darmstädter Beiträge X* (Thoma, 1966) s príspevkami z rovnomennej muzikologickej konferencie *Form in der neuen Musik* obsahoval aj texty G. Ligetiho, M. Kagela, R. Haubenstock-Ramatiho a E. Browna.

<sup>6</sup> Adorno (1970b). Prednáška bola dedikovaná pamiatke Wolfganga Steineckeho, významného nemeckého muzikológa a hlavného iniciátora Darmstadtských kurzov.

prednášky sú polemikou s darmstadtskou avantgardou, rovnako aj polemikou s A. Weberom. V darmstadtských textoch zaznieva volanie po 'oslobodenej hudbe', po *musique informelle*. Manifest je pokračovaním 'sporu' s dodekafonickou hudbou, ktorý začal už v Adornovej *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (Adorno 1949) a potom v prednáške *Vom Altern der neuen Musik* (Adorno 1958).<sup>7</sup>

Prednáška *Vers une musique informelle* je o hudbe, ktorá by mala byť a ktorá vlastne už v určitej podobe bola a treba sa ku nej vrátiť ako k určitému „hudobnému ideálu“. Adornova definícia „neformálnej hudby“ v českom preklade, evokujúca akoby univerzálny filozofický problém fenomenológie, znie:

Je jí míněna hudba která odhodila všechny formy jež v poměru k ní byli vnější, abstraktní, strnulé, která však – dokonale osvobozena od všeho, co na ni bylo vkládáno jako heterogénní a cizí – se objektivně konstituuje ve fenoménu, nikoliv v těchto vnějších zákonitostech. (Adorno 1970b, s. 9)

*Musique informelle* má byť protikladom hyperorganizácie a kontroly v hudbe, jej racionálnej manipulácie, ktorá chce mať všetko pod absolútnou kontrolou. Podľa Adorna „prokonstruovaná totalita“ (Adorno 1970b, s. 11) mala byť synonymom prírodovednej kauzality a logiky v hudbe, ale zároveň indikovala nevyhnutné smerovanie hudobného vývoja. Pre Adorna je potom dôsledkom serializmu serialistami proklamovaná eliminácia skladateľského subjektu, snaha o desubjektivizáciu hudobnej výpovede.

S podobným formulovaním problému modernej hudby ako racionalizácie hudobného subjektu sme sa už stretli v Adornovej *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1949), v ktorej sa Adornov povestný výrok o strate slobody a nadvláde materiálu vzťahoval na A. Schönberga a A. Webera:

Das Subjekt gebietet über die Musik durchs rationale System, um selber dem rationalen System zu erliegen. [...] Aus den Operationen, welche die blinde Herrschaft des Stoffs der Töne brachen, wird durchs Regelsystem zweite, blinde Natur. (Adorno 1969, s. 67)

Prednáška *Vers une musique informelle* bytostne súvisí so súdobou mienkotvornou monografiou *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, v ktorej bola idea neformálnej hudby anticipovaná v súvislosti s „heroickým decéniom“ preddodekafonickej atonálnej hudby u A. Schönberga a A. Webera od roku 1910 do 1920. Bola to však predovšetkým hudba A. Berga ktorá Adornovi zvrchovane napĺňala ideál *musique informelle* (Schweiger 2009). Podľa Adornovho manifestu, neformálnym tendenciám slobodnej hudby v atonalite sa postavila do cesty Schönbergova dvanásťtónová kompozičná metóda, či skôr jej ultraortodoxné poňatie u nasledovníkov, ktorí sa k tomuto dedičstvu hlásia v mene problematickej novej objektivity. Podľa Adorna (1970b, s. 10) je

<sup>7</sup> Tento text možno považovať za estetický manifest či programový dokument novej hudby, porovnateľný s vplyvným manifestom F. Busoniho *Entwurf einer neuen Ästhetik in der Tonkunst* (1907), ako „úvodom“ do estetiky „novej“ hudby. Manifest-esej *Vers une musique informelle* je víziou novej „neformálnej“ hudby, ktorá by bola alternatívou serializmu, víziou slobodnej či skôr oslobodenej hudby.

nevyhnutné vrátiť sa od prísneho hudobného determinizmu dodekafónie k voľnej atonalite:

Vzhľadom k fingovanej hudobnej subjektivite je treba znovu obnoviť proces, ktorý Schönberg zbrzdil, keď jej zdánlivo svými geniálne novými princípmi hnal kupredu. Ideje slobody, slobody bez jakýchkoliv ústupkov, by sa mala chopiť znovu neformálna hudba.<sup>8</sup>

Podľa filozofa je pre neformálnu hudbu charakteristický kompozičný nominalizmus, prevaha detailu a jednotlivého nad vopred daným celkom, zvláštneho v protiklade ku všeobecnému.<sup>9</sup> O kompozičnom nominalizme v tomto zmysle hovoril Adorno v súvislosti s kontrapunktom v štúdiu *Die Funktion des Kontrapunkts in der neuen Musik* (Adorno 1997d).

Manifest prichádza nielen s pojmami všeobecného a zvláštneho, ale aj s pojmami kauzality, objektivity a subjektivity, determinizmu, indeterminizmu, antinómie záväznosti a slobody. *Musique informelle* je v rozpore s fetišizmom a so zvecnenou racionalitou dvanásťtónovej organizácie. Hudobno-teoretická argumentácia v prednáške *Vers une musique informelle* sa tak prelína s esteticko-filozofickou argumentáciou inšpirovanou I. Kantom, F. Hegelom, ako aj s neomarxizmom Frankfurtskej filozofickej školy v Adornovej knihe *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947), ktorú napísal spolu s Maxom Horkheimerom. V jej intenciách, komponovanie podľa algoritmov (*patterns*) v serializme je prejavom univerzálnej a skrytej tendencie robotickosti, mechanickosti buržoáznej spoločnosti: „V robotskom podílu sa prejavuje niečo, čo tkví skrytý v celej buržoáznej hudbe, totiž aspekt zvecnenej racionality vôbec.“ (Adorno 1970b, s. 27)

Adorno vo svojom manifeste citoval Schönbergovu odpoveď D. Milhaudovi, v ktorej Schönberg vyjadruje pochybnosť, či mladá generácia serialistov s dvanásťtónovým systémom aj skutočne komponuje, či nechce, aby tento systém „komponoval za nich“:

Všetchno se v něm bránilo proti tomu, že by tóny samy ze sebe mohli komponovat, nebo dokonce že by jejich čistá existence byla smyslem hudby. (Adorno 1970b, s. 15)

V eliminácii kompozičnej nadstavby bola podstata sporu medzi Schönbergom a serializmom, ale aj sporu medzi Adornom na jednej strane a Cageovou aleatorikou na druhej strane:

Cage, jak se zdá přisuzuje – snad v souvislosti se zenbuddhismem – tónu zbaženému veškeré domnělé nadstavby metafyzickou sílu. Představa o destrukci nadstavby je však přírodovědecká, ať už tak, že vyloupneme akustickou podstatu tónu, nebo že se – v principu náhody – svěříme počtu pravděpodobnosti. (Adorno 1970b, s. 17)

<sup>8</sup> Adorno sa vo svojom manifeste odvolával na štvrttónové kompozície českého skladateľa Aloisa Hábu ako anticipujúce jeho *musique informelle*, presnejšie na Hábov proklamovaný „slobodný hudobný sloh“ (*Musikstil der Freiheit*).

<sup>9</sup> Aspektu „nominalizmu“ v Adornovom *Vers une musique informelle* je venovaná štúdia M. Zencka (1978, s. 140), ktorý uvádza: „Dies Moment der Rebellion des Einzelnen gegenüber einem vorgegebenen Formganzen hat Adorno als nominalistische Tendenz aller neuzeitlichen Musik gekennzeichnet.“



V Cageovej hudbe ide o vzdanie sa kontroly hudby subjektom, čo vyjadruje Adorno (1970b, s. 27) slovami o potrebe „nechat ji rúst, nezasahovať do ní v naději – podľa Cagea – že tím promluví nikoliv Webern, ale tón“. Táto tendencia v estetike Darmstadtu, v kontradičcii s ideou *musique informelle*, smerovala ku konvergencii pôvodne nezlučiteľných protikladov serializmu a aleatoriky.<sup>10</sup>

Obsah prednášky intenzívne rezonoval medzi skladateľmi a teoretikmi v darmstadtských diskusiách, čoho príkladom je neskoršia štúdia P. Bouleza *Penser la musique aujourd'hui* (1963) ako uvádza Zenck (1978, s. 156–157). Spomedzi účastníkov darmstadtských seminárov to bol popri Boulezovi predovšetkým maďarský hudobný skladateľ György Ligeti, s ktorým Adorno zdieľal ideu *musique informelle*. Spoločné bolo aj ich presvedčenie o zblížovaní sa pôvodne proklamovaných absolútnych protikladov dodekafónie a aleatoriky. Reflexie formy konvergovali s Adornovou *musique informelle* v Ligetiho štúdiách *Wandlungen der musikalischen Form* (1958) a *Form in der neuen Musik* (1966). Adornov koncept *musique informelle* ovplyvnil aj Ligetiho orchestrálne kompozície *Adventures* (1962) a *Nouvelle Adventures* (1965).<sup>11</sup> Účastník darmstadtských kurzov, skladateľ Gianmario Borio, vychádzajúc z Adornovho manifestu, navrhol vlastnú estetickú teóriu a hudobnú analýzu vo svojej neskoršej knihe *Musikalische Avantgarde um 1960*.<sup>12</sup>

### 3 Prednáška *O niektorých ťažkostiach pri komponovaní v súčasnosti*

V roku 1965 vyšla v periodiku *Slovenská hudba* Adornova štúdia *O niektorých ťažkostiach pri komponovaní v súčasnosti* ako preklad prednášky *Schwierigkeiten beim Komponieren* prednesenej v brémskom rozhlase v roku 1964 (Adorno 1965a, 1965b).<sup>13</sup> Filozof v nej čerpal podnety a inšpirácie z literárnej eseje nemeckého dramatika Bertolta Brechta *Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit* (1935). Esej ortodoxného marxistu-leninistu Brechta obhajovala funkciu umenia ako ideológie, propagandy v triednom boji proti kapitalizmu a fašizmu, politickej angažovanosti umelcov, ktorí nemôžu zostať apolitickí.

Podľa Adorna (1965a) hudbu ohrozuje narastajúci ideologický charakter praktizovaný v socialistickej kultúre. Tento ideologický charakter je úzko prepojený s použitím tradičných vyjadrovacích prostriedkov umenia, ako aj s opozíciou proti radikálnym avantgardným postupom v mene tradičných postupov. Tradicionalizmus v považuje za súčasť ideológie. Objavuje sa tu tiež jedna zo základných Adornových paradigiem, podľa ktorej progresívna hudba

<sup>10</sup> Ozvenu Adornovej polemiky s Cageom v prednáške *Vers musique informelle* môžeme počuť aj v jeho bratislavskej prednáške.

<sup>11</sup> Ligetiho recepcia Adornovej *musique informelle* bola východiskom jeho analýzy a kritiky kompozície K. Stockhausena *Klavierstück I* (1952). Pozri bližšie Ligeti (1966, s. 31) a porov. Zenck (1978, s. 153).

<sup>12</sup> Pozri bližšie Borio (1993). V tejto súvislosti Pudlák (2011, s. 29) poukazuje na súvislosť so skladbou Wolfganga Rihma a na jeho adornovské inšpirácie v orchestrálnom cykle *Vers une symphonie fleuve* (1992–2000) evokujúcou názvom titul prednášky Th. W. Adorna.

<sup>13</sup> Slovenský preklad eseje vyšiel v Adornom revidovanej a autorizovanej verzii, ako na konci štúdie uvádza prekladateľka Neumannová.

musí byť hudba radikálne nová, moderná a avantgardná (hoci paradoxne napokon ohrozená zideologizovaním), čo Adorno (1965a, s. 355) deklaruje s rozhodnosťou slovami: „Pohybovať sa hudobne v rámci tradície je objektívne predznačenou nemožnosťou.“

Zo skutočnosti zotrvávania hudby v tradičných paradigách filozof odvodil ďalšiu paradigmu modernej hudby: disproporciu, nesúlad medzi objektívnym stavom hudby a subjektívnou muzikalitou, medzi rozvojom technických produktívnych síl a spôsobmi ľudskej reakcie. Podľa nej, niektorí skladatelia nestačili reagovať na inovácie a zabrzdili tak vo vývoji sami seba. Adorno videl v tomto jave analógiu hudobných a celospoločenských disproporcií, nesúladu technických produktívnych síl a spoločenského vedomia (schopnosťami využiť a kontrolovať tieto sily). V rámci formulovaného esteticko-filozofického problému Adorno videl disproporciu a rozporupnosť u skladateľov ako R. Wagner, B. Bartók, P. Hindemith, R. Strauss, ale napokon predovšetkým u skladateľov avantgardnej hudby.

V súčasnosti sa nesmierne zväčšila diskrepancia medzi subjektívnym stavom komponovania a vývojom spojeným heslami ako integrálny kompozičný postup a elektronika. Medzi kompozičným subjektom a kompozičnou objektivitou sa otvorila priepasť. (Adorno 1965a, s. 356)

Identický problém Adorno nastolil v súvislosti s tvorbou B. Bartóka aj v diskusií so slovenskými muzikológmi a skladateľmi v Bratislave v roku 1966.

Brechtova esej bola pre Adorna podnetom, aby nastolil otázku, ktorej zdrojom je pojednanie *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. (Adorno 1947) Ide o otázku bytostného statusu hudby a umenia, ich prispôsobivosti voči spoločenským či mocenským nárokom, požiadavkám účelovosti a konformnosti, voči požiadavke plne sa integrovať sa do vonkajšieho sveta a byť s ním kompatibilný. Podľa takto nastolenej filozofie kompozície však umenie a hudba majú byť v bytostnom antagonizme s vonkajším svetom. Všetko, čo sa odohráva vo vývoji umenia a hudby je sublimovanou podobou dejinno-spoločenskej dynamiky. (Adorno 1947) Aj v umení a hudbe sa odohráva zápas oslabeného subjektu v snahe vymaniť sa z tlakov heteronómnosti a racionality, ako konštatuje Adorno (1965a, s. 358): „Hudobné dejiny posledných štyridsiatich rokov zdajú sa mi históriou pokusov o hudobné odbremeňovanie.“ Adorno sa tým opäť vrátil ku príčinám vzniku dodekafónie a serializmu A. Schönberga, A. Berga a A. Weberna, následne sa mu v eseji *Vers une musique informelle* vynára vízia oslobodenej hudby.

#### 4 České preklady štúdií Th. W. Adorna o A. Bergovi a A. Webernovi

Darmstadtské prednášky tematicky súvisia s mnohými článkami, esejami a štúdiami užšie zameranými na problematiku atonality a dodekafónie v hudbe autorov Druhej viedenskej školy. Prelínajú sa aj so schönbergovským pojednaním *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1949) a napokon aj s poslednou Adornovou monografiou *Berg. Der Meister des kleinen Übergangs* (1968). Ako jediná prednáška tohto zamerania, preložená do češtiny, sa objavuje štúdia *Alban Berg, Anton Webern, Bergovy skladebné technické prínosy* (1970). Nemecký

originál má takmer identický názov *Bergs kompositionstechnische Funde* (*Bergove kompozično-technické objavy*, 1961). Pri porovnávaní týchto a ďalších textov zistíme, že v prípade prekladu I. Vojtěcha ide však nielen o obsahový výťažok zo štúdie *Bergs kompositionstechnische Funde*, ale text je skombinovaný do jedného celku ešte s ďalšími dvomi textami filozofa z Adornovho súboru prác *Klangfiguren* (pôv. 1959), a to Adornovými esejami *Alban Berg* a *Anton von Webern*.

Esej *Bergs kompositionstechnische Funde* je z neskoršieho Adornovho zborníka *Quasi una Fantasia* (1963).<sup>14</sup> Všetky tri eseje sú prezentované ako jedna esej v troch segmentoch, všetky figurujú v názve jednotného českého textu. U Adorna pôvodné skompilovanie týchto nemeckých textov do jedného textu nepoznáme, pravdepodobne ho pre český preklad autorizoval.<sup>15</sup> Účelom kombinácie troch textov bola zrejme širšia komparácia a konfrontácia Berga a Weberna, a napokon je to aj konfrontácia s ich učiteľom A. Schönbergom, ktorý tu však stojí skôr v pozadí. Konfrontáciou tvorby Berga a Weberna sa kompilačný text približuje Adornovej ranej štúdii v angličtine *Berg and Webern – Schönberg's Heirs*. (Adorno 1997c)

Všetko, čo Adorno o Webernovi napísal v monotematických prácach zameraných na kompozičné úsilie svojho nasledovníka predstavujú štyri menšie esejistické texty venované Webernovým raným atonálnym skladbám, vrátane textu ktorému tu venujeme pozornosť, a tiež porovnávacej eseje *Anton von Webern* (1932).<sup>16</sup> Impulzom Adornovho zvýšeného záujmu o Weberna bolo práve darmstadtско-kranichsteinské fórum, kde bol na konci vojny zosnulý skladateľ predmetom osobitnej pozornosti ako 'duchovný otec' a priamy predchodca seriálnej hudby.<sup>17</sup> Adorno však nesúhlasil s ich stotožňovaním sa s Webernom, ktorý v organizácii materiálu nezašiel tak ďaleko ako serialisti.

Adornova esej *Alban Berg*, ktorou česká verzia Adornových textov začína, má na začiatku charakter vyznania, osobnej spomienky na Berga, ktorý bol nielen jeho učiteľom, ale aj priateľom. Bergova hudba mu bola mentálne najbližšia a bol ním najviac ovplyvnený ako hudobný skladateľ. Adorno (1997c) svoj pohľad prezentuje cez hĺbkovú sondu a prienik do skladateľovho života, osudu, osobnosti, psychologicko-ludského typu, determinujúcich jeho hudbu, jej recepciu, jeho prijatie, či neprijatie, do európskej kultúry.<sup>18</sup> Podľa Adorna, Berg sa fyzicky aj mentálne podobal na anglického spisovateľa-estéta Oscara Wildea, čo vyjadril zvláštnym konštatovaním (Adorno 1970a, s. 402): „Jeho afinita k novoromantizmu a esteticizmu ho utvárela až po fragilní fyzickou

<sup>14</sup> Všetky tri texty sú novodobo publikované v Adornovej edícii *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 16, *Musikalische Schriften* (pozri bližšie Adorno 1997a, b, d, e, h, j).

<sup>15</sup> Vydanie menovaných prác o skladateľoch druhej viedenskej školy bolo príspevkom k jej recepcii v českom a slovenskom hudobnom povedomí.

<sup>16</sup> Analytické poznámky k Webernovi sú však roztrúsené vo všetkých darmstadtských textoch, ktoré v našej štúdii zmienujeme.

<sup>17</sup> Z darmstadtského fóra vzišlo aj vydanie periodika *Die Reihe* (1955), ktoré bolo celé venované A. Webernovi (hoci do periodika Adorno neprispel).

<sup>18</sup> V prípade Berga je to *Jugendstil*, secesia, atmosféra *fin de siècle*, atmosféra estétstva, ktorá sa, podľa Adorna, odrazila na jeho krehkom ľudskom type.

existenci.“ Adornovi teda nešlo iba o hudobno-historickú determinovanosť hudby, a keďže počas svojho štúdia absolvoval prednášky zo psychoanalýzy (obdivoval Siegmunda Freuda), jeho estetika má aj psychoanalytický rozmer. Prejavilo sa to nepochybne v hĺbkovo-psychologických výkladoch Bergovej hudby, keď v súvislosti s Bergovými operami *Wozzeck* (1925) a *Lulu* (1937) hovoril o sublimácii pudovosti, potlačujúcich mechanizmoch, túžbe po smrti. Úvahy sú založené aj na psychoanalytickej konfrontácii Bergových a Wagnerových opier, keď Adorno (1970a, s. 402) rezultuje:

Avšak to ľudské, jeho expresívny obsah je pravým opakom Wagnera s nimiž ho hrubý sluch zamieňa. Chorobná posedlosť Bergovy hudby neplatí vlastnému Já. Nemíri k narcistnému sebezbožšteniu.

Adornova esej nám v mnohom môže pripomínať psychoanalytické eseje Thomasa Manna o R. Wagnerovi. Je príznačné, že len ojedinele, marginálne, či skôr v podtexte sa v jeho estetických úvahách objavuje pojem dvanásťtónovej techniky, ktorý v tomto zmysle akoby nevyčerpával podstatu Bergovej hudby. Výroky o Bergovej konštrukčnosti a prekalkulovanosti, integrálnom komponovaní s charakteristickým zmyslom pre hustotu, mikrodetail a preartikulovanosť obsahovo rezonujú s jeho darmstadtskými prednáškami, najmä s prednáškou *Form in der neuen Musik* (1966). „Přes kořenně propletenou hustotu svého ústrojenství a komplementárně k oné hustotě je Bergova hudba proartikulována až do posledního tónu“ (Adorno 1970a, s. 403). V tektonickej charakteristike Bergovej hudby je prítomný fenomén hudby „malých (nepostrehnuteľných) prechodov“, „infinitesimalného princípu“<sup>19</sup>, povedané matematickou terminológiou. Formovo-tektonický dynamizmus „malých prechodov“ Adorno neskôr použil v názve monografie *Berg. Der Meister des kleinen Übergangs* (1968). Adorno sa tu pokúsil svoju dynamicko-tektonickú a estetickú charakteristiku Berga rozšíriť a zasadiť do širšieho kontextu Schönbergovej a Webernovej hudby, ale najmä do kontrastu s hudbou serializmu a hudbou Stravinského, tak, ako to už urobil predtým vo *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1949).

Štúdiá o Bergových kompozičných objavoch (Adorno 1997a) sa začínajú reflexiou o Webernovi. Skúsenosť Bergovej hudby, majúca analógie s výtvarným umením, je skúsenosťou amorfnej a difúznej tvarovosti, mikrotektoniky podobnej maliarskemu smeru tachizmu. Mikrotektonika však nie je nedostatkom invencie, ale, ako hovorí Adorno (1970a, s. 412), reprezentuje

úsilí dosíci atomizací kompoziční látky jistý druh kvantitativního rozkladu, celek o nejvyšší hustotě bez trhlin a hran, bez rušivého prvku dílčích částí. [...] Koncepce vnitřně prorostlého, pudově se rozšiřujícího organizmu uzmula jednotlivým útvarům jejich obvyklou patrnost.

Pre Berga charakteristické štiepenie – atomizovanie a delenie už atomizovaného materiálu vytvárajúce organizovaný „chaos“ ako formotvorný fenomén – vo výsledku predstavuje integrálnu formu, totalitu hudobných javov. (Adorno 1997e, s. 624)

<sup>19</sup> Adorno formuloval tento princíp v nadväznosti na raného Schönberga, jeho „rozvíjajúcu sa variáciu“ (*entwickelnde Variation*), ktorá Adornovi stelesňovala jeho ideál *musique informelle*. Pozri bližšie Adorno (1970a).

Adorno (1997f) vystihol charakter Bergovej hudby, ako hudby permanentne v procese rozpúšťania smerujúcej k úplnému stíšaniu, zániku, k minimu, k jednotlivému tónu. Skladateľ týmto spôsobom narábal s dvanásťtónovým systémom (v porovnaní so Schönbergom a Webernom) „neortodoxne“ či „nedôsledne“, jeho potenciál nachádzal v pokračujúcom štiepení a atomizovaní hudobnej štruktúry. Berg (ale aj raný Schönberg a raný Webern) Adornovi (1970a, s. 411) stelesňovali ideál *musique informelle*:

Pro dnešní kompozici je Berg aktuální protože rozvinul nezávisle na dvanáctitónové technice impulzy které jsou bližší primárním impulzům atonality, *musique informelle*, než to, co atonalitu zracionalizovalo.<sup>20</sup>

Adornova esej *Anton von Webern*, druhá v poradí z triády štúdií preložených do češtiny ako jeden celok (Adorno 1970a), podáva obraz Webernovej hudby, na rozdiel od homogénneho obrazu Bergovej hudby, s istou dávkou ambivalencie zobrazujúc kontrapozíciu *mladého* a *starého* Weberna. Súvisí to so statusom Weberna v Darmstadte, kde bol 'veľkou témou'. Adorno vnímal darmstadtskú recepciu Weberna ako nie celkom oprávnené „privlastnenie si“ Weberna, keďže pre filozofa predstavoval „osudové smerovanie“ Schönbergovho dvanásťtónového systému, ako o ňom sugestívne písal krátko po druhej svetovej vojne (Adorno 1949). K obrazu hudby neskorého Weberna ako totálnej determinácie dospel Adorno už vo *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1949). Rozporuplnosť raného a neskorého Weberna, je však podľa Schweigera (2009, s. 257) skôr Adornovým sporným esteticko-filozofickým konštruktom. Súčasťou plánu anulovania schönbergovskej netotožnosti dodekafóniou predformovaného materiálu a kompozície bola skutočnosť, že u neskorého Weberna sa predformovaný materiál stáva samotnou kompozíciou. (Adorno 1997, s. 409)<sup>21</sup> Webern eliminuje úlohu subjektu, ktorý u neho „abdikuje“, odmlčí sa poddávajúc sa materiálu.<sup>22</sup>

V kritike dodekafónie A. Schönberga a A. Weberna, ako aj v Adornovom pojme fetišizmu, opäť silne rezonuje text Adornovej et al. (1947) knihy *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Pojem fetišizmu je *leitmotívom* aj v štúdií o Webernovi preloženej do češtiny (Adorno 1970a). V tomto kontexte treba chápať Adornov kriticismus voči obom protagonistom Druhej viedenskej školy. Na túto kritiku sa možno pozeráť tiež ako na esteticko-filozofickú interpretáciu súdobého vývoja kompozičnej techniky v intenciách „osvietenskej dialektiky“.

<sup>20</sup> K problému analýzy Bergovej hudby sa Adorno vyjadril aj v prednáške *Zum Problem der musikalischen Analyse* (1969), konanej pol roka pred svojou smrťou na pôde Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst vo Frankurte nad Mohanom. V improvizovanej prednáške, ktorá sa zachovala len v prepise z magnetofónového záznamu, filozof ponúka aj kľúč aj k českému súboru prednášok. Pozri bližšie Adorno (2001).

<sup>21</sup> Na Adorna v tomto smere priamo nadväzuje Faltin (1992).

<sup>22</sup> Tento problém hlbšie analyzuje Kopčáková (2020, s. 99–100). To je súčasne ďalší doklad o recepcii Adorna v našej myšlienkovvej tradícii, aj keď nie je explicitný.

## 5 Marxistická interpretácia Adornovej *Philosophie der neuen Musik* u Josefa Beka

V predchádzajúcich úvahách sme pomerne často nachádzali argumentačnú oporu v kontextoch Adornovej knihy *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1949). Adornova monografia bola v českej a slovenskej hudobnej kultúre v čase socializmu zrejme najznámejším opusom nemeckého filozofa,<sup>23</sup> platí to však aj v širšom kontexte euro-americkej povojnovej muzikológie. Súčasne je však nepochybne najviac kriticky hodnoteným Adornovým dielom, pomerne sporným vo svojich tézach.<sup>24</sup> Jediná známa systematickejšia kritická reflexia Adornovej *Philosophie der neuen Musik* v českej a slovenskej muzikologickej literatúre v skúmanom období, pochádzajúca od českého marxistického muzikológa Josefa Beka, sa objavila až o 30 rokov neskôr po vydaní Adornovej knihy. Týka sa v podstate jej druhej časti t.j. textu o Igorovi Stravinskom. Bek skoncipoval dovedna dva adornovské texty: štúdiu *Adorno, Stravinskij a Martinů* (1979) a monografiu *Hudební neoklasicizmus* (1982), v ktorej je jedna kapitola nazvaná *Kritika neoklasicizmu* (Bek 1982) je venovaná analýze Adornových hodnotení na adresu tvorby I. Stravinského v jeho knihe (Adorno 1949).

Bek (1979, s. 504) Adornovu „filozofiu Novej hudby“ vysoko ocenil slovami: „Není pochyb, že to je neobyčejně sugestivní, promyšleně a s širokým teoretickým zázemím konstruující obhajoba druhé vídeňské školy.“ V prvej štúdiu *Adorno, Stravinskij a Martinů* (1979) je evidentné, že Bekovi ešte chýbalo širšie teoretické zázemie.<sup>25</sup> Bek oponoval Adornovej paušálnej kritike Stravinského, marginalizujúcej jeho význam v hudbe 20. storočia. Poukázal tiež na Adornov bezvýchodiskový pesimizmus a negativizmus, podobne ako na ne poukazovali autori českého marxistického zborníka o Frankfurtskej škole (Javůrek 1976; pozri tiež Fulka 2020). Konštatoval, že Adorno sa v skutočnosti vo svojej filozofii neprejavil ako beznádejne „spenglerovský“ pesimista. Takto paušálne hodnotila filozofa napr. marxisticko-leninská filozofia a estetika. Naopak, budúcnosť európskej hudby (hoci do určitej miery redukcionisticky) videl v rozvíjaní dedičstva Druhej viedenskej školy, v podobe *musique informelle*. Bekova kritika Adornovho pesimizmu a negativizmu vychádzajúca z marxistických pozícií (sovietskej aj československej proveniencie), bola ideologickou estetikou, pôvodne zavrhujúcou I. Stravinského ako prejav degenerácie buržoáznej kultúry (V. Gorodinský, J. Keldyš, u nás M. Barvík, Z. Nováček a i.).

Príčinu negativizmu prejavujúceho sa v radikálnom odmietnutí neoklasicizmu, folklórnych inšpirácií a hudby Stravinského, videl Bek (1982, s. 65) „v Adornovej neochote, respektíve neschopnosti prijať dôsledne historický materializmus,“ a tiež v neprijatí marxistickej dialektiky.<sup>26</sup> Poukázal tiež na

<sup>23</sup> Vo svojich textoch o Druhej viedenskej škole či o I. Stravinskom ju zdieľali viacerí slovenskí muzikológovia (P. Faltin, P. Kolman, J. Kresánek, N. Hrkčková).

<sup>24</sup> Za určite jednu z najsbornejších je považovaná téza o antagonizme medzi kompozičným myslením, hudobnou poetikou, filozofiou a tvorbou A. Schönberga a I. Stravinského.

<sup>25</sup> K tejto skutočnosti sa samotný Bek (1982) neskôr priznal, kde už mal väčší prehľad o problematike a sa snažil onen deficit napraviť, ba čitateľom sa aj ospravedlnil.

<sup>26</sup> Bek (1982) evidoval rodiacu sa „zdravú opozíciu“ voči rozkladným tendenciám buržoáznej kultúry (zrejme mal na mysli socialistickú kultúru), ktoré Adorno nedokázal zaregistrovať.

paradoxnú skutočnosť, že Adornovo odmietnutie Stravinského bolo do určitej miery paralelné s ideologickou marxisticko-leninskou kritikou hudby buržoáznej epochy, hoci ich smerovania boli odlišné:

S tvrdými odsudky Adornovými zaujímavé korespondovaly prvé marxisticky orientované pokusy o zhodnocení neoklasicizmu vo vzťahu k rodící se socialistické kultuře. Ideologické motivy a cíle byli samozřejmě hluboce protikladné. (Bek 1982, s. 72)

Pravda, kritiku Stravinského u Adorna (1997j) a kritiku skladateľa zo strany marxisticko-leninskej estetiky nemožno celkom adekvátne porovnávať. Bek (1982, s. 73) sa usiloval vysporiadať s vulgarizujúcimi ideologickými interpretáciami v českej muzikológii, tým že ich označil za krajné ideologické simplifikácie<sup>27</sup> a korigovať tieto ideologické nadintepretácie nielen vo vzťahu k neoklasicizmu Stravinského, ale najmä smerom k obhajobe neoklasicizmu B. Martinů.

Adornova 'vykonštruovanosť' však mala svoju značne sofistkovanú (neo)marxistickú esteticko-filozofickú bázu progresu a regresu, ktorú Bek zrejme nepoznal, preto ani neodčítal, aký dôležitý filozofický kontext predstavuje kniha *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947) pre *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1949). Dedukujeme to na základe faktu, že *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947) nie je uvedené v bibliografii Bekovej monografie (1982). Polemizujúc s *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, Bek v skutočnosti polemizoval nielen s *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, ale aj so západnou verziou marxistického učenia.

## 6 Adornova prednáška *Formové princípy súčasnej hudby* v Bratislave

Kolokviálna prednáška *Form der neuen Musik* (1965) nepatrí medzi texty preložené do češtiny alebo slovenčiny publikované u nás vo vymedzenom období. Napriek tomu má však osobitný status ako možný východiskový text Adornovej bratislavskej prednášky. Z toho dôvodu jej venujeme pozornosť chápujú ju ako úvod k diskusii filozofa so slovenskými muzikológmi. Adornova pozornosť sa v Darmstadte osobitne zameriavala na problémy hudobnej formy v novej hudbe a prednáška *Form der neuen Musik* (odznela 1965, publikovaná bola v roku 1966) je toho deklaratívnym prejavom, nastoľujúc užší (estetický) a širší (hudobný) koncept hudobnej formy (Adorno 1997e, s. 607).

V Adornovom skúmaní formy ide teda aj o prítomnosť univerzálnejšieho estetického rozmeru, ako aj o pokus o zjednotenie týchto konceptov-polarít: estetický koncept hudobnej formy v intenciách hudobného dynamizmu, homeostázy, dynamickej rovnováhy, statizmu a dynamizmu, obsahu a formy, všeobecného a zvláštneho, celostného a jednotlivého, subjektu a objektu.<sup>28</sup> V koncepte hudobnej formy sa tu vynárajú kontexty Kantovej estetiky, Heglovej

<sup>27</sup> „Adornova negativistická argumentace proti Stravinskému a neoklasicismu byla očividně vykonstruována“ (Bek 1982, s. 78; pozri tiež Adorno 1997ch).

<sup>28</sup> Podobný estetický koncept bol vzápätí formulovaný v prednáške *Vers une musique informelle* (1960).

filozofickej estetiky či dynamickej hudobnej formy hegliánskeho hudobného teoretika Augusta Halma.

Podstatou formy novej hudby v Druhej viedenskej škole (Adorno ju nazval „nová hudba“) bola podľa Adorna strata platnosti všeobecne platných formových modelov. Ich rozpad spočíval v porušení dynamickej rovnováhy, vyváženosti polarít pôvodných hudobných foriem, predovšetkým v oblasti tonálneho dynamizmu. Filozof ju označil ju za krízu foriem (Hiekel 2016, s. 237), ktorej dôsledkom je, že prestali platiť tradičné všeobecné schémy a kánony, polarita všeobecného a zvláštneho. Tento diskurz mal zrejmú nadväznosť na formové paradigmy Darmstadtských kurzov, napr. na Boulezovu kapitolu Form, v jeho *Musikdenken Heute 2* (Boulez 1985). Táto kríza priniesla závažné estetické implikácie dezintegrácie vo formách novej hudby pri jej radikalizácii; vrátane „straty koherencie, jasnosti kompozície, ako aj o nejednoznačnosti funkcie detailu v celku.“ (Adorno 1997e, s. 617)<sup>29</sup> Adornove formové reflexie aj tu korešpondovali s teoretickými a praktickými smerovaniami Darmstadtu, najmä u K. Stockhausena a jeho momentovej formy (*Momentform*), ako aj u G. Ligetiho.<sup>30</sup> Z úvah o forme Adorno odvodzoval aj definičné aspekty novej hudby. Pre hudobnú formu novej hudby je u Adorna typický formový pluralizmus: navrstvovanie viacerých štruktúr (*die Überlagerung mehrerer Strukturen*), kde sa členenie deje skryto, akoby pod povrchom (Adorno 1997e). Toto vymedzenie súčasne naplňa aj charakteristiku formy *musique informelle*.

Prednáška *Formové princípy súčasnej hudby* sa uskutočnila v apríli 1966 v sídle Zväzu slovenských skladateľov v Bratislave. Darmstadtská prednáška *Form in der neuen Musik* (1966) sa javí ako pôvodná verzia bratislavskej prednášky. V oboch textoch, slovenskom a nemeckom, možno poukázať na nápadné paralely, hoci Adorno čerpal aj z iných svojich textov.<sup>31</sup> Bratislavská prednáška začína, rovnako ako jej predpokladaná nemecká verzia, úvahou o širšom estetickom a užšom hudobnom pojme formy, nasledujúce fragmenty a citácia pochádzajú buď z jej publikované ho prepisu (Adorno 1966) alebo nemeckého originálu (Adorno 1997e).<sup>32</sup>

Na jednej strane jestvuje estetický pojem formy. Ten v umeleckom diele znamená všetko, čo je umeleckým dielom a nie iba reprodukciou reality. Oproti tomuto estetickému pojmu formy stojí hudobný pojem formy, aký dôverne poznáte z oblasti nazvanej náuka o hudobných formách v užšom slova zmysle, teda náuka o vnútornom časovom usporiadaní jednotlivých hudobných prejavov. [...] Pod pojmom formy rozumieme isté vopred dané typy. (Adorno 1966, s. 385)

<sup>29</sup> Fragment, dezintegrácia a diskontinuita sa stali aj Adornovou zásluhou významnými kategóriami v teórii novej hudby. Aj Adornovej posmrtné vydanie knihy *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970) sa fragmentarizácia a dezintegrácia formy stali dôležitými estetickými kategóriami.

<sup>30</sup> Pozri bližšie Stockhausen (1963). Adorno svoju dialektiku integrácie a dezintegrácie zdieľal s G. Ligetím, ako na to upozornil v knihe *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970).

<sup>31</sup> S textom bratislavskej prednášky sa evidentne prelínajú iné Adornove texty, napr. *Vers musique informelle* a *Kriterien der neuen Musik*, a v jednom momente sa Adorno odvolal aj na prednášku *Das Altern von der neuen Musik*.

<sup>32</sup> Na základe ich detailnej komparácie, ktorú nemožno na tomto mieste uviesť v plnom rozsahu, uvádzame niekoľko podstatných oblastí, ktorých sa filozof vo svojej lektúre dotkol.



Formové reflexie v oboch štúdiách sa na začiatku týkajú obsahu a formy v hudbe, pričom Adorno, vzhľadom na dobu a kultúrne prostredie kde prednášal, nezabudol pripomenúť tému marxisticko-leninskej estetiky, teóriu socialistického realizmu, jeho dichotómiu obsahu a formy. Adorno hovorí v protiklade k tomu o sedimentovanom, sublimovanom obsahu vo formách. V každej hudobnej forme je zahrnuté niečo ako stuhnutý sedimentovaný obsah (*gegenständlichen Inhalt*), viazaný na hudobný detail (Adorno 1997e, s. 608), pričom poukázal na to, že obsah sa prejavuje v hudobnom dynamizme, dynamickej forme.<sup>33</sup>

Problém dynamizmu obsahu a formy ako všeobecného a zvláštneho má paralelu v dynamike dejinno-spoločenských procesov, kde harmónia medzi záujmami jednotlivca a celkovými záujmami zlyhala. O hudobných formách teda podľa Adorna vypovedá aj filozofia dejín, čo ilustroval na prerozprávaní výroku G. F. Hegela o tom, že „všeobecné a zvláštne v buržoáznej spoločnosti sa nikdy nezhodli.“ (Adorno 1966, s. 387) Vývoj v 20. storočí smeroval k rozpadu klasickej dynamickej rovnováhy a homeostázy klasických foriem, ku zlyhaniu sprostredkovania obsahu a formy, všeobecného a zvláštneho v klasických formách. Za kardinálny problém klasickej aj novej hudby v oboch textoch Adorno považoval dynamizmus vo vzťahu ku statickému momentu opakovania, reprízovosti, ktorý je pre neho opäť paralelou historického vývoja spoločnosti. Forma, tektonika, emancipácia novej hudby u Schönberga, Berga a Weberna sa prejavuje v redukcii, ba eliminácii schém, reprízovosti, opakovania. Adorno hovorí v súvislosti s atematizmom o invariantnosti. Nová idea oslobodenia a slobody, o ktorej hovorí Adorno v bratislavskej prednáške silne rezonuje s estetickými kategóriami všeobecného a zvláštneho ako aj s problémom „kompozičného nominalizmu“, rezonujúc tak s *ideou musique infomelle* v jeho štúdií *Vers une musique informelle*.

Adornova nová idea hudobného slohu slobody (*Musikstil der Freiheit*) s elimináciou opakovania sa realizuje v mikroštruktúrach u Weberna, najmä v jeho skladbách čo najkratšieho rozsahu, kde sa

bez ťažkostí mohla uskutočniť akási identita medzi formou a jednotlivou udalosťou, pretože v istom zmysle sa hudba vôbec viazala iba na jednotlivú udalosť. (Adorno 1966, s. 389–390)

V bratislavskej prednáške aj v nemeckej prednáške Adorno upozorňoval na nesprávne paušalizujúce stotožňovanie modernej hudby a dvanásťtónovej techniky a tvrdenia že atonalita nestačila na veľké formy. V tejto otázke nachádzame paralelu textov bratislavskej prednášky a darmstadtkej prednášky *Vers une musique informelle*.<sup>34</sup> Adorno poukázal aj na implikácie dvanásťtónovej kompozície, pričom ju objasňoval v kontexte kritiky dodekafónie vyslovenej už

<sup>33</sup> Problém dynamizmu obsahu a formy ako všeobecného a zvláštneho je ako formový problém riešený v Beethovenovej hudbe a má paralelu v Heglovej filozofii. Heglovo pojednanie *Phenomenologie des Geistes* a Beethovenova hudba sú hlboko príbuzné. (Adorno 1966, s. 387)

<sup>34</sup> Adorno sa pri bližšom vysvetlení tvrdenia opieral aj o článok o Erwina Steina z roku 1924, hudobného skladateľa a teoretika, ktorý bol žiakom A. Schönberga. Stein vo svojom článku *Neue Formprinzipien* (1924) ako prvý sformuloval pravidlá kompozície s 12-tónovým systémom.

v diele *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1949) a čiastočne už v *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947). V bratislavskej prednáške zazneli aj myšlienkové ozveny na originálne konštitučné idey Frankfurtskej filozofickej školy.

## 7 Diskusia slovenských skladateľov a muzikológov s Th. W. Adornom v Bratislave

Po Adornovej prednáške sa uskutočnilo na vtedajšom *Zväze slovenských skladateľov* diskusné fórum za účasti slovenských skladateľov a muzikológov: Ladislava Burlasa, Eugena Suchoňa, Miroslava Bázlika, Oskara Elscheka, kunsthistorika a estetika Mariana Várossa, českého hudobného skladateľa Věroslava Neumanna. Na prednáške a besede bolo podľa svedectiev pamätníkov viacej účastníkov a asi aj diskutujúcich, než je zachytené v jej publikovanej forme, teda písomnom zázname diskusie (N. Hrčková, P. Faltin, P. Kolman). Diskusia bola publikovaná v časopise *Slovenská hudba* pod typicky 'adornovským' názvom *Dnes je možné iba radikálne kritické myslenie* (1967). Introdukciou k nej bolo redakčné exposé, v ktorom sa hovorí o nevyjasnených problémoch smerovania hudobnej avantgardy, niektorých kompozičných postupov, o vývinovej kontinuite, ako aj o morálnych konfliktoch skladateľa v súčasnom svete.

Ako prvý v diskusii vystúpil L. Burlas<sup>35</sup>, ktorý hájil kontinuitu 'večných' princípov hudobnej tvarovosti a princípov, súhrn hudobno-dynamických centripetálnych a centrifugálnych síl a ich nutnosť uplatňovaných v modernej avantgardnej hudbe. Ide o princípy, ktoré darmstadtští serialisti programovo zavrhlí, snažiac sa radikálne prestrihnúť kontinuitu s tradíciou. Adorno dáva Burlasovi za pravdu slovami: „iný princíp ako princíp podobnosti, odlišnosti [t.j. kontrastu. Poznámka V.F.] a modifikácie je sotva mysliteľný“ (Adorno 1967, s. 97–98).

Burlas to v následom vstupe pochopil ako problém parametrického narábania s hudobnými prvkami v serializme.<sup>36</sup> Adorno na Burlasove veľmi kvalifikované otázky a poznámky reagoval v tom zmysle, že problém vysvetľoval cez parametrické narábanie s hudobnými prvkami v izolovaných tónoch u jeho kranichsteinských priateľov (t. j. hudobných skladateľov v Darmstadte), a to v zmysle svojho manifestu *Vers une musique informelle*, kde parametrickému rozmeru venoval pozornosť v rámci kritiky kompozičnej poetiky K. Stockhausena.<sup>37</sup>

Špecifickej téme neoklasicizmu v diskurze akoby vyšiel v ústrety slovenský kunsthistorik-estetik Marian Váross svojim konštatovaním o problematickosti

<sup>35</sup> Burlas ako popredný hudobný skladateľ a teoretik podľa našich informácií túto diskusiu, ako uvádza Kopčáková (2017, s. 200), aj moderoval. Pozri tiež Chalupka (2011).

<sup>36</sup> Burlasove popularizačné informačne nahustené články o dodekafónii a serializme, publikované v časopise *Slovenská hudba* v roku 1962 patria medzi raritné v súdobej publicistike už vzhľadom na ich tému, ktorá nebola cenzormi vítaná, avšak v čase pozvoľného uvoľnenia pomerov v prvej tretine 60. rokov 20. storočia už bola možná (Kopčáková 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Adornov diskusný príspevok teda silne evokoval jeho darmstadtškú prednášku *Vers une musique informelle*, ktorú z prítomných zrejme málokto poznal.

adaptability historických foriem do novej hudby. Adorno mu odpovedal v intenciách svojej eseje *O niektorých ťažkostiach pri komponovaní v súčasnosti*, ako aj knihy *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, nasledujúcim značne rigoróznym vyhlásením (Adorno 1967, s. 99):

Pokusy o regeneráciu novej hudby azda tým spôsobom, že sa jej chýbajúce formotvorné prvky priradujú zvonka, z tradície, považujem za pomýlené.

Adorno bol známy tým, že zásadne neprijímal neoklasicizmus, čo odôvodňoval svojím pevným presvedčením, že hudba z princípu nemôže žiť z adaptácie toho, čo bolo, alebo sa nemôže stále znova k tomu vracieť. Tento názor bol v súlade s estetikou boulezovskej avantgardy, teda o čosi zmierlivejším postojom k Stravinského adaptácii, ktorá sa javila ako jediná možná cestou paródie, skreslením, znetvorením pokrivením, „nalomením“.<sup>38</sup>

Hudobný skladateľ Eugen Suchoň vyprovokoval Adorna vyjadriť sa k citlivej téme Bélu Bartóka, citlivej preto, lebo osobnosť maďarského veľikána sa bezprostredne dotýkala témy folklóru v hudbe 20. storočia. Tomu zodpovedala aj Adornova iniciálna odvolávka na kultúrne prostredie Československa, aby naznačil, nakoľko chýlostivá je preňho táto otázka. Adorno ako dedič heglovskej dialektiky všade nachádzal protirečenia, antinómie, polaritu a rozpory, a v tomto zmysle, dvojitou optikou videl aj Bartóka. Svoj pohľad na skladateľa zavŕšil narážkou na to, že Bartók sám so sebou nevedel držať krok, teda v jeho tvorbe vnímal prítomný rozpor objektívnych produktívnych síl a subjektu, jeho reakčnej schopnosti, ktoré nie sú vždy paralelné. Sú to objektívne produktívne sily ako tendencie rozkladu tonality atonality, voči ktorým stojí subjektívna Bartókova zakorenenosť v tonalite a modalite.

Akási vnútorná inštancia ho privolala nazad, akoby nebol vedel celkom držať krok [...] a toto vracanie sa neostalo bez vplyvu na kvalitu jeho diel. (Adorno 1967, s. 100)

Pre Adorna to bol v Bartókovej hudbe kompromis a Adorno nepripúšťal v hudbe nijaký kompromis. Poznajúc však povojnový obdiv k Bartókovi v krajinách s nastoleným trendom socialistického realizmu v umení, ako jedného z východísk tvorby, následne zmiernil tón – keďže nemal v úmysle znížiť integritu Bartóka – vyjadrením (Adorno 1967, s. 100):

Výrazom kompromis som skutočne len chcel naznačiť, že Bartók sa pokúsil zdolať ťažkosti medzi objektivizovaním formy a subjektívnym impulzom – pôžičkou z minulosti.

Napokon, uznal, že podobné kompromisy robil aj A. Berg a A. Webern.

O. Elsček, inicioval následne tému porovnávania, možností mimoeurópskych hudobných kultúr vo vzťahu ku európskej, ich nekompatibilite, na čo Adorno

<sup>38</sup> Adorno sa domnieval, že Stravinského inšpiroval kubizmus P. Picassa. Stravinského duchaplnosť je pre Adorna východiskom z neoklasicizmu. Pokiaľ je neoklasicizmus myslený 'vážne', bez ironického odstupu, ako u P. Hindemita, je to suchopárny akademizmus.

vyslovil pochybnosť či je možná hudobná reč, spájajúca európsku umelú hudbu s folkloristickými elementami.<sup>39</sup>

Skladateľ Miroslav Bázlik na Adornovu zmienku o formovej fantázii v súvislosti s novou hudbou reagoval pomerne skeptickou poznámkou. V celom kontexte Bázlikovej otázky a Adornovej reakcie šlo v zásade predovšetkým o problém fantázie v súvislosti s Druhou viedenskou školou, Adorno na exemplifikáciu a argumentáciu použil príklady z tvorby A. Berga, ale aj P. Bouleza. Oponoval svojmu diskutérovi pojmom formovej fantázie predovšetkým v súvislosti s hudbou A. Berga. Na adresu svojho oponenta Miroslava Bázlika Adorno (1967, s. 104) vyhlásil:

V nijakom prípade by som nesúhlasil s Vaším tvrdením, že by sa v modernej hudbe nevyškvtlo mimoriadne úsilie o formovú fantáziu.

Na záver besedy Adorno, reagujúc na Burlasom vyslovené obavy z ďalšieho vývoja hudby, vyslovil svoju povestnú vetu ako presvedčenie, použité neskôr ako titul pri publikovaní písomného záznamu z besedy: „Dnes je možné iba radikálne kritické myslenie.“

Obhajobou „racionálneho pesimizmu“ a skepsy z vývoja sveta, evokujúcou v podtexte jeho dielo *Negative Dialektik* (1966), uzavrel krátky náhľad do svojej originálnej filozofie hudby. „Negativitu“ v Adornovom filozofickom systéme svete možno chápať ako rigoróznosť a nekompromisnosť pokiaľ ide o pravdu a umeleckú hodnotu. Negatívna dialektika znamená nielen radikálne kritické myslenie, ale aj stratu ilúzií, hoci Adornova rigoróznosť v extrémnych prípadoch občas nadobúdala až dogmatický charakter. Adorno šiel až do krajnosti, keď v negatívnej sile pobadal aj niečo oslobodzujúce, čo sa pokúsil umocniť naozaj radikálnym tvrdením na adresu vývoja umenia (Adorno 1967, s. 104):

[A]k by som mal voliť medzi možnosťou, že sa umenie celkom odmlčí alebo odstráni a možnosťou, že umenie sa na celom svete bude riadiť a podrobovať cieľom, ktoré sú mu cudzie, dal by som prednosť odmlčaniu sa umenia.

Aj tak však dúfal, že k tomu nedôjde – „ináč by som teraz tu predsa nehovoril“, ukončil svoj výstup Theodor W. Adorno.

## Záver

Cieľom štúdie bolo znovuobjaviť Adornove texty preložené do češtiny a slovenčiny v období socializmu v 60. - 80. rokoch 20. storočia, uviesť ich do kontextov a súvislostí s inými Adornovými muzikologicko-estetickými textami, s dobovou a v malej miere aj súčasnou reflexiou a kritickým. Konštatujeme, že napriek pomerne objemnej vedeckej produkcii jedného

<sup>39</sup> Tu sa nepochybne odhalil Adornov ojedinelý ortodoxný konzervativizmus hudobného artificializmu, podľa ktorého sú akékoľvek folklórne inšpirácie prejavom regresivnosti. To pravdepodobne mohlo na slovenskom fóre vyvolať určitú vlnu nesúhlasu. Podľa spomienok účastníkov (čo vieme len z ústneho podania pamätníkov), zrejme na adornovskom fóre zaznela, v publikovanom prepise to však nie je zaznamenané.

z najvýznamnejších filozofov a estetikov hudby v 20. storočí, početnosť, ale aj recepcia a následná reflexia jeho filozofie hudby a muzikologickej koncepcie v podobe textov preložených v súdobej muzikologickej či estetickej publicistike je pomerne skromná. Takto môžu vzniknúť pochybnosti jednako o relevancii jeho myslenia v našom prostredí, a jednako – odvolávaním sa na súdobú kultúrno-politickú situáciu – môže sa veľmi elegantne a bezbolestne vysvetľovať táto absencia.

Pravdou však ostáva, že aj v nepriaznivých podmienkach totalitného režimu socializmu sa s Adornovými podnetnými, hoci často aj kontroverznými textami, u nás darilo nenápadne otvárať 'okná a dvere' novým myšlienkovým prúdom, ktoré v období studenej vojny do istej miery mohli pôsobiť ako dva paralelné svety. Adornove myšlienky – čo ako provokatívne a vzbudzujúce pochybnosti a nevôľu na strane poslucháčov či oponentov – však napriek povedanému obohacovali českú a slovenskú muzikológiu a estetiku, napomáhali prekonávať strnulý dogmatizmus charakteristický pre kultúrnu atmosféru doby a etatistického režimu.

Nepočetné publikované preklady Adornových prednášok a textov však v tomto kontexte boli skôr príslubom do budúcnosti, aj keď v Adornovom domácom prostredí už boli sondami do aktuálnej prítomnosti stávajúc sa v okamihu už vlastne minulosťou. Sme toho názoru, že aj dnes máme stále dobrý dôvod vracat sa k Adornovým textom, prekladať ich a komentovať. Tým je povedané, že aj v aktuálnom dnešku možno považovať muzikologický a esteticko-filozofický potenciál za ideovo nevyčerpaný a stále inšpiratívny.

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# On Some Novel Encounters with Fine Arts

## Where to Search for Aesthetics and Where Aesthetics May Have Something to (Re)search

Zoltán Somhegyi

In this paper, I examine some of the various ways, spaces, and situations in which one can currently encounter aesthetic content and have an aesthetic experience. By focusing on examples coming from the world of fine arts, my survey will tackle a double question: I will try to investigate where to search for aesthetics and where aesthetics may have something to (re)search. Considering the novel forms of art presentation that are related to the spread of alternative exhibition spaces, I will examine the emergence of new audiences, the rising power of the art market and art commerce, and their dubious influence on the creation of new standards and canons of art. | Keywords: *Aesthetics, Aesthetic Experience, Infrastructure of Contemporary Art, Art Market, Art Fairs, Museums*

Imagine an average visitor during her holiday spending some time in a luxurious shopping mall where high-end works of art are also shown. If she still has some time to kill between shopping, dining and movies, she may also enjoy for example Juan Miró's works, just to quote an actual example, as it happened in the Polygone Riviera mall in France (Sansom, 2016 and Somhegyi 2017). Besides watching the works, she may perhaps also wonder how come that these works are now available to be observed so easily and for free, as so far she had normally seen famous artists' works in museums with expensive entrance fees. Let's also imagine this was not her last day in the vacation, but has two more, on which she is planning to go to see the recently opened experimental art space, the Muzeum Susch of the Polish collector Grazyna Kulczyk in the relatively close-by Swiss Alps. (Collector Grazyna Kulczyk's, 2019) Our imaginary tourist is curious of it also because it is not in a traditional art hub, not in downtown New York and not even in Zurich, but an hour from Basel. Therefore, while driving back she may be wondering why the



rich collector decided to show the art pieces in the remote and isolated location, and how the experience of travelling there and back adds to her experiencing the exhibited piece.

In the above imaginary situation, we have seen different sets of questions that involve various forms of arts and their experiencing, consumption, and appreciation. This example encompasses some possible research areas for the contemporary aesthetics of fine arts – the field I am focusing on in this paper – that I think may be worth mapping further, for example by examining diverse forms of encounters with aesthetic content in today's world. As we shall later see, this investigation is also an enquiry into aesthetics as a discipline. Indeed, while identifying new problems to be studied in aesthetics, we can also learn something new about the discipline per se. Mine is thus a “quest for aesthetics” in a double sense: both as a search for the ‘aesthetic’ and as a search for where aesthetics may have something to (re)search. Specifically, I aim to examine some of the new occasions of encountering aesthetic contents, forms, and experiences today, while considering how aesthetics as a discipline can contribute to the understanding of these complex issues.

There are many areas and aspects where aesthetics as a discipline needs to apply its methods, occasionally also renew its approaches, in certain cases justify its legitimacy and – let's not be afraid of claiming it – also defend its authority. From the myriad of possible issues, however, here I will only focus on the broad area of fine arts, in order to come back to the multiple aesthetic experiences of our imaginary tourist form above: what are the new forms, novel modes and innovative ways of encountering aesthetic content, how do they affect art appreciation and what can aesthetics as a discipline search in this?

Long gone are the days of “classical” forms of encountering visual and fine art works – if, there were at all, i.e. if we can nominate or consider any one particular period's or era's ways, venues, traditions and norms of encountering pieces of art as standard. In fact, art appreciation is continuously changing throughout history. Many art lovers still think and are perhaps nostalgic of the time when museums were simply places of exhibitions and galleries were to sell the works. However, this description is not only idealised in many ways but also heavily simplified, as the situation had never been so clear and straightforward.

For example practically right from the beginning, museums – both as actual institutions as well as the very concept of the museum itself – can be interpreted as somehow dubious, and their “pure scientific” image can be brought into question. This is especially the case when considering the aspects and instances of rivalry between the newly established institutes of the nation-states of the 18th-19th centuries, also with regard to their impulsive ways of collecting objects from Antiquity, partly motivated by the consideration that the (new) nation hosting and displaying the origins of human culture is not only the legitimate inheritor of the actual objects, but also the culmination of human culture itself. (Somhegyi 2020, chapter 11.)

Looking at the other side, another well-known fact and art historical commonplace is that the commercial art galleries were and are not necessarily only in the service of financial gain, but often helped to promote avantgarde art, well before progressive contemporary pieces could make their way in large national institutes. In this way commercial galleries often contributed to the “institutionalising” of the progressive pieces, hence, in a curious change of positions sometimes bold commercial galleries may have substituted the function of museums in canonising works. Well-known historical examples of this highlight the role played by small galleries and studios, independent exhibitions, and salons in promoting Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painting in the late-19th century. A few decades later, in the ‘40s, a similar role was played by Peggy Guggenheim’s museum-gallery, “Art of this Century”. This space contributed to better public dissemination of avant-garde art by exhibiting the work of some leading art figures, who in some cases (e.g., Pollock, Motherwell, Baziotes) had their first one-man shows there (Guggenheim, 2005, 314.). Today for-profit galleries often organise bolder, more innovative, and more inspiring exhibitions than large-scale institutions, mixing contemporary and classical pieces – although these latter are not for sale, but are exhibited just for curatorial reasons.

The situation was thus never really straightforward, however in today’s world it gets even more complex, due to several factors and challenges. One is definitely the radical increase of contemporary – and, in fact, also of classical – artworks’ prices. The higher and higher auction records definitely grab the attention of even those who are not really interested in and/or following neither the classical nor the contemporary art worlds’ events, it is enough to think of the hype around the 450-million-USD *Salvator Mundi* by Leonardo in 2017. These spectacular prices, breaking records, breaking news and sometimes even breaking of artworks – just remember Banksy’s half-shred piece... – definitely confuse the non-specialised members of the larger public, and then this confusion contributes to, what’s more: nurtures, the ambiguity in the relationship between aesthetic and market value. This is not surprising, however, since the complicated nexus between the financial and aesthetic value is much convoluted and often very contradictory. Indeed, the dichotomic connections between these two values is not easy to trace even for the specialists. For example, philosopher Mark Sagoff (1981) argues that economic value, though seemingly easy to grasp, can be used to understand more about the aesthetic value of art. Towards the end of his paper, aesthetic value is distinguished into two kinds of value: (1) the value of art as an institution, and (2) the relative value of an individual piece of art (Sagoff, 1981, 328). In the conclusion, however, Sagoff approaches the question of the basic difference between aesthetic and economic value by translating it from the realm of the philosophy of art to that of anthropology (*ibid.*). He claims that: “The difference between the aesthetic and economic value of art, then, may be simply explained. It is the difference between the sacred and the profane.” (Sagoff, 1981, 329).

It may be worth comparing Sagoff's understanding of the difference between aesthetic and economic values with some considerations by Tomas Kulka, published in the same issue of *The British Journal of Aesthetics*. In his conceptual distinction between artistic and aesthetic value, which also takes into account cases of fakes, forgeries, and copies, Kulka argues that artistic value is what determines the significance of a particular piece and its status in the history of art – i.e. how “new” the piece is and whether it can be considered as a turning point in the history of art. Aesthetic value, on the other hand, describes the particular qualities of that work of art, e.g. the visual qualities of a painting. When artworks are involved, these two kinds of values are not necessarily on the same level (e.g. equally high or low) but may have completely different ratios. For example, an aesthetically unsuccessful work can later acquire significance in the history of art; alternatively, as the years go by, a well-executed piece can be forgotten. Nevertheless, as Kulka claims: “It seems to me that a certain minimal presence of each of the two-component values is necessary for an object to qualify as a work of art.” (Kulka, 1981, 343).

Sagoff's and Kulka's treatments of the various kinds of values that are attached to artworks may help us both clarify why the audience is often confused when faced with contemporary art and also understand some of the anomalies involved in today's art consumption. This adds to the fact that undeniably certain works have an established although often not clearly understandable fascination – a classical example is the *Mona Lisa* that is currently practically invisible due to the large masses of tourists in front of it, while in the neighbouring rooms there are at least five other very fine Leonardo paintings that remain almost unnoticed compared to the lure of the *Mona Lisa*. Or, as George Goldner, former chairman of the drawings and prints department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York recalled, “A week after the sale of the *Salvator Mundi*, I happened to be at the National Gallery and I wandered into the room with *Ginevra de' Benci*, which is a much better painting in much better condition than the *Salvator Mundi*. There was not a single other person there.” (Italics in the original. Quoted in Ruiz, 2018)

Another addition to the complex landscape of contemporary art world, institutions and market, is the growing – and, naturally, again greatly ambiguous – role of private collectors. Their connection and (inter)relationship with art institutions are not without tensions and mutual jealousies, mainly regarding financial possibilities and/or state sponsorship. In any case however we can see amazing private collections, many of them can easily dwarf the possessions of numerous national or state museums. This may, at first, seem as a pure gain for visitors who thus have more places to choose from, however, again not as simple as that. At least two questions arise that could perhaps have even more attention in aesthetic discourse. One is whether these private collections are only for the pure sake of art and were born because of the owner's passion for art, or, if not, how much of strive for increasing status symbol, legitimacy of wealth or even pretentiousness is behind the collection-building? It is thus not surprising if for many, these questions – *mutatis mutandis* – are reminders of the debates over the scientific purity of 18th-19th

century museums. The other question worth examining from an aesthetic viewpoint and especially with its consequences for aesthetics is how much the art commerce in general and private collections in particular modify the canon of art, especially that of contemporary art that is understandably and necessarily still more flexible than the more established classical canon, even if this latter is never entirely fixed either, see for example the recent re-discovery and re-evaluation of Baroque woman painters.

Adding some further concerns to the above considerations on art, its market and the aesthetic consequences of their relationship, especially with regard to the ever blurrier division of functions between the actors and factors of the art infrastructure, we can also mention some potential issues with the large-scale art events, including the mushrooming art fairs. During these three-four-day commercial events the participating galleries show their artists, as in most of the fairs it is not directly the artists, but the galleries representing them that exhibit. The fairs, especially the leading ones are very expensive, to the booth rental one also needs to add the shipping costs, customs, insurance, accommodation, travel, per diem etc. For many art collectors the fairs are the primary acquisition events, and they enjoy the opportunity of having a great overview of the contemporary offer plus they also appreciate the publicness of the fair and the transparency of the event. Based on these one might easily think at first that the galleries participate solely for the hope of selling the works to the collectors visiting the fair. However, again we cannot simplify it as much, because, speaking honestly, the well-visited fairs may also serve as a great general publicity for an artist. Despite the few days of opening, the biggest fairs are seen by several thousands of visitors, and obviously not all of them are full-time collectors, but also curators, art critics, advisers, journalists, patrons, politicians, specialised bloggers, influencers or general art-lover intellectuals. Hence it is not surprising that many artists are often happier of participating in a leading art fair, than even in the National Gallery of a smaller country, since the difference in visitor number can be ten-fold. Naturally this also gives a large responsibility to the organisers and selection committees of the fairs too, as the large number of visitors and the diffuse media coverage often disseminates the aesthetic content seen at the fair much more than in the case of a gallery or museum show. Hence again a game changer shaking up the traditional division of functions, especially if we add the issue of entrance fees – although most of the fairs have quite pricy entrance ticket, some fair organisers decide not to charge visitors or at least heavily subsidise the ticket for students, thus strengthening their mass-educative function in the palette of cultural events.

It would however be too easy to explain the popularity of these events with the glittery hype around some forms and manifestations of contemporary art. It is perhaps explainable or partially explainable with the interest of the visitors in other, new places and forms of experience. And naturally this could again be analysed with regard to its aesthetic consequences – can we perhaps simply say that, at least in some ways, visitors are right in desiring novel forms of experiencing art? This may also make us remember Robert Ginsberg's

affirmation: “Experience, not theory, is the creative source for responding, reflecting, and exploring. Philosophers who work on aesthetic matters need to keep their soul full of experience – and not only of aesthetic objects.” (Ginsberg, 1986, 78) Agreeing with Ginsberg we can say that the wider public’s seeking for novel forms of experience can be considered as natural, and the new approaches of art consumption should not be automatically judged as unprofessional or lowbrow and popular in the negative connotations of the words. This is also because, from a historical perspective, artworks have been presented in a variety of ways in different periods. We can observe changes in styles and designs in the installation of art pieces and exhibitions, which shapes the way art lovers experience the shown artworks. It is sufficient to quote some examples to illustrate this claim. Consider for instance the usual display of paintings in late-Baroque and 18th-century aristocratic galleries, where the pictures densely filled the walls, their frames almost touching each other – as portrayed e.g. in the paintings by Giovanni Paolo Panini or Hubert Robert. Compare this to the 20th-century sterile and homogenous white cube-type spaces, where artworks are presented as detached from one another to be enjoyed separately, with no exogenous visual element and no other work interfering with the recipient’s perception. Obviously, these two exhibition spaces allow for completely different experiences of art. In the latter experience, as the pieces stand on their own, one focuses on the qualities of the individual artwork rather than on the (possible) connections between the artworks exhibited. Referring back to Kulka’s above-mentioned distinction, in the Baroque installation style of the princely galleries it is the artistic value that emerges, while aesthetic value stands out in white cube-type spaces.

This, however, only works at the level of the actual and individual display: but what if the entire exhibition is organised in a non-traditional space? For instance, what would happen if we installed the artworks in a classical ruin, in an abandoned factory, in an airport, or a container in the middle of a large metropolis? Again, the peculiar location influences the way we perceive the exhibited works and opens up new interpretative perspectives that may not come up in more traditional venues. Since a novel venue and a new way and style of exhibiting can add further interpretative layers and also increase and diversify the aesthetic experience – in virtue of the “surprising” character of the presentation – they can lure into the exhibition even those visitors who do not generally attend to art shows. Optimistically, this kind of “alternative” exhibitions may bring back the less-dedicated public to traditional museums, once their curiosity has been raised by these special occasions. Hence, what seemed just a natural change in the style of art exhibition may be intentionally used for good purposes – yet always *cum grano salis* –, to promote valuable aesthetic experiences and raise awareness on the insights art can provide us with.

What’s more, the proper and scholarly aesthetic examination of the lure of encountering artworks in new contexts and of the fascination of alternative modes of art consumption could also help finding bold answers for the current challenges that classical museums have to face, since undeniably traditional

museums still have not only high relevance but also growing responsibility. Tristram Hunt, director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London summarised some of these tasks: “In an era of deepening nationalism and parochialism, where accounts of ethnic purity and manifest destiny abound, the ability of museums to tell complicated stories of hybridity and cosmopolitanism is vital. (...) Museums need to be brave in confronting the big issues. (...) Museums need to provide a civic arena for contentious debate. Through our exhibitions and public programme, we can frame and generate discussion with the kind of respectful and inclusive approach that is so often absent from contemporary political discourse. As politics gets more heated, we shouldn’t fear that it is too difficult to entertain all shades of opinion under our roofs. We can show leadership in curating the ethics of disagreement.” (Hunt, 2018) Hunt’s opinion is also extremely useful for finding novel ways of function and functioning of the museum. The investigation of these tasks may also remind us of Boris Groys’ recommendation, who argues for the museum to be converted from a place where we merely contemplate objects to one where things happen (e.g. lectures, presentations, discussions, screenings etc.), hence an institute that keeps an intellectually fertile flow of events and activities. (Groys, 2013) These more event-like and experiential curatorial projects can ideally attract new audience into the old institutes, without losing the visitors with more classical taste.

All this may also convince us that there should be even more cooperation between the various institutions instead of rivalry and mutual jealousy. The bold, experimental and experiential projects, crossover collaboration between actors and factors of the wider art infrastructure can be rewarding for all, and aesthetics as a discipline can only benefit when following and analysing these tendencies and the numerous potential insights gained from the conscious analyses of these issues and phenomena. One of the areas to be further investigated, and from which important contributions to aesthetics may arrive, concerns the nature of experiencing, enjoying, and even “benefiting” from art. How does the perception of art change when novel modes of art presentation arise? How can we identify and investigate the aesthetic implications that this addition may have for the perception and interpretation of artworks that particular modes of exhibition and/or non-traditional venues provide? This leads us from aesthetic questions to questions of aesthetics itself, i.e., to an investigation of whether we have the right tools to evaluate such new issues within the discipline of aesthetics. Does aesthetics need to re-invent itself – its methodologies, approaches, and forms of research – in order to offer a thorough analysis of these new phenomena in art and in the perception and consumption of art? Should aesthetics focus on tightening its connections with other forms of scholarly and intellectual engagements with art, such as art criticism, art history, critical curatorial studies, sociology of art? Or does it rather have to emphasise the particular aspects of art that can only be described within (traditional) aesthetic research?

Coming back to our original questions and also to our imaginary average art-inclined tourist from the beginning of this paper, we shall then not necessarily

worry if she sees Miró's works in the mall for the first time, or if she ruminates not only on the artworks but also over her own experiencing of these very artworks in the isolated private contemporary art collection in the Alps, because all this may be natural additions in the offers of showing and encountering artworks today. Our work and duty, however – as professionals and practitioners of aesthetics – is not merely to describe these novel ways of encountering art, but also to individuate those areas in which aesthetic scholarship may be particularly useful to analyse such phenomena, examine questions about art and its presentation and, if relevant, warn us about the possible threats arising from the modifications of taste that may influence the canon driven by economic or political reasons. We shall not be afraid to consider aesthetics as a leading platform for discussing art, rather than an academic discipline practiced in universities and separated from the actual art world. This is why the careful investigation of new ways of encountering art may become an enquiry into the present state, the role, and the future of aesthetics itself. By finding adequate and inspiring solutions to address current issues in contemporary culture, aesthetics will not only secure its status as a legitimate academic discipline but will also open up new possible worlds where to search for aesthetics and where aesthetics may have something to (re)search.

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# Fictional Objects within the Theory of Mental Files: Problems and Prospects

Zoltán Vecsey

A recent version of the mental file framework argues that the antirealist theory of fictional objects can be reconciled with the claim that fictional utterances involving character names express propositions that are true in the real world. This hybrid view rests on the following three claims: (i) character names lack referents but express a mode of presentation, (ii) fictional utterances introduce oblique contexts where character names refer to their modes of presentation, and (iii) modes of presentation are mental files. In this critical paper, I will argue that the proposed view runs into a number of theory-internal problems. These problems arise partly from the unclarity inherent in the notion of mental file, and partly from a mistaken semantics for character names. I will also argue that adherents of fictional realism can make use of the notion of mental file without encountering similar difficulties. | Keywords: *Antirealism, Fictional Objects, Mental Files, Character Names, Reference, Representation*

## 1 Fictional Objects in the Mental File Framework

The technical notion ‘mental file’ has been used recently by philosophers of language and theoretical linguists to explain the nature of singular thought and reference in natural language. Although there is no general consensus concerning the explanatory function of this term, it is widely agreed that the primary role of mental files is to store and manage information and, occasionally, misinformation about the objects we are somehow acquainted with. For example, Recanati (2012), a leading theorist of this approach, assumes that we can gain information/misinformation from a particular object when we stand in an epistemically rewarding relation to it. Sensory perception is the paradigm case of this kind of information gathering. We become aware of our immediate external environment by seeing or otherwise perceiving the sensory features of particulars. Acquaintance relations are usually interpreted normatively rather than logically or metaphysically in this area of research. We

open a mental file when there is an appropriate information channel between us and the object the file is about. This can be taken to be the normal or default situation. But it is not necessary (either logically or metaphysically) that there *actually* be such an information channel. Information gathering seems possible even in cases where acquaintance is merely imagined or simulated. Future-directed discourse is a good case in point. Our talk about the future is often based on acts of imagination. We have a natural inclination to make statements about future objects as if they were real existents in the world. In the broad sense of the term, we can thus specify objects that do not actually exist. We can attach proper names to “them”, share our ideas about “them” and so forth. Imagination provides us with pieces of information that can be mentally stored in the usual manner. These and similar cases indicate that under certain circumstances mental files may be opened even in the absence of genuine epistemically rewarding relations.

This latter putative feature is what makes the notion of ‘mental file’ so attractive to theories of fictional objects. If we can indeed store and manage information/misinformation about purported objects in mental files without being actually acquainted with these purported objects, then by relying on this notion, we may try to give an account of how we can think of and talk about fictional persons and events.

Take for example the character of Sherlock Holmes in Conan Doyle’s detective novel, *A Study in Scarlet*. Holmes is portrayed in the novel as being a detective. It is easy to check that Conan Doyle uses the proper name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in his story consistently as if it were a genuinely referring singular expression. Yet we know that there is no such detective in the real world, external to the story. So regarding its semantic status, ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is a non-referring name. Given these two facts –that the main protagonist of Conan Doyle’s novel is not a real person, and that ‘Sherlock Holmes’ does not refer to anything– it seems puzzling that we can gather so many pieces of information “about” Holmes and his deeds. We know very well that “he” is an outstanding detective, that “he” is a pipe-smoker, that “he” lives at 221B Baker Street, London, etc. Intuitively it seems we are able to think many singular thoughts involving these pieces of information. And it seems, again intuitively, that by expressing these thoughts we are able to make a potentially unlimited number of meaningful singular statements about the protagonist of the novel. How is this possible?

It is not easy to resolve this many-layered puzzle but it appears to be a good initial step to reflect on the way we collect information and misinformation about such fictional objects as Holmes. Adherents of the *antirealist* approach to fiction have recently offered an elegant and at first sight plausible explanation for this process.<sup>1</sup> The basic idea of this explanation is that, from the point of view of readers, fictional works should be conceived as prescriptions to *imagine*.<sup>2</sup> Novels and short stories prescribe us to imagine that things are

<sup>1</sup> More precisely, antirealists are in agreement concerning the generic structure of the explanation, but they offer different versions of it. For example, see the works of Friend (2011, 2014) and Salis (2013).

<sup>2</sup> The first occurrence of this idea is to be found in Walton (1990).

a certain way. In order to understand and appreciate a fictional work properly, we should follow as closely as possible the prescriptions originating from the narrative of that work. If the narrative tells us explicitly that there is a detective who smokes the pipe, lives at 221B Baker Street, London, etc., then we should imagine that there really is a detective who has exactly these properties. And if the narrative contains occurrences of ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in referring positions, then we should imagine that tokens of this name really refer to a person. Imagination does not require that we be committed to fictional objects; it requires merely that we be committed to pieces of information (and possibly misinformation) that can be extracted from the relevant narratives.

Given this basic idea, it is surely a well-motivated theoretical move to argue that this kind of information should be thought of as being collected in mental files. Antirealists who sympathize with the mental file conception of singular thought are obliged to say something about the nature of files. The common view, again originating from Recanati, is that a mental file usually consists of three components: the file itself with a certain label, the informational content of the file, and the reference-fixing relation that determines which object the file is about. As we have seen, when our targets are fictional works, the last component cannot be a genuine epistemic relation to an object external to a given narrative. But this does not generate a serious problem for the view. Thanks to our imaginative activities, labelled files can be opened and can be filled with pieces of information without the presence of external anchors. We can proceed broadly in the following manner. In reading the novel *A Study in Scarlet*, we encounter the character name ‘Sherlock Holmes’. As a reaction to this reading experience, we open a mental file labelled with ‘HOLMES’. All of the Holmes-relevant information that we can extract from the text of the novel will then be collected in the HOLMES file. We know, however, that our mental activities are governed in this process by the rules of imagination. And therefore we also know that when we deploy our HOLMES file we can refer only to an imagined person. According to the antirealist picture, this is why and how we can generate mental files on fictional characters and events with which we cannot, in principle, be acquainted.

Now the question arises whether the basic idea of this type of mental file theory is tenable or not. It is important to keep in mind that most adherents of the antirealist approach are convinced that *fictional objects do not exist*. On their view, there is simply no such fictional character as Holmes. But can such an allegedly nonexistent character be accounted for in terms of mental files?<sup>3</sup> In my own view, the short answer to this question is *no*. More cautiously, my claim is that we have good reasons to be skeptical concerning the explanatory power of the antirealists’ mental file framework.

In what follows, I will focus my critical attention on the most recent version of the framework, elaborated and defended by Orlando (2017). Orlando’s conception deserves attention for two reasons. First, the proposed framework is

<sup>3</sup> On this question, see also Murez and Smortchkova (2014).

sufficiently general for being a target of criticism. Second, Orlando supplements the standard conception of mental files with a semantic theory that gives a new twist to the ongoing debate about the interpretation of fictional statements. In Section 2, I briefly outline the main elements of Orlando's antirealist proposal. In Section 3, I try to point out that the proposed framework suffers from serious internal problems. Finally, in Section 4 I try to show that the notion of mental file is much less problematic when applied within the boundaries of a realist theory which acknowledges the existence of fictional objects.

## 2 Extending the Framework with a Two-Level Semantics

According to the mental file doctrine, if someone becomes acquainted with the novelist Jonathan Franzen, they open a file labelled with the mental name FRANZEN, and henceforth store or delete information/misinformation about Franzen exclusively in this very file. That is, they possess the individual file about Franzen, labelled with the mental name FRANZEN, and filled with descriptive concepts like 'born in Illinois', 'author of *The Corrections*', 'wearing spectacles', etc. Of course, different instances of the FRANZEN file may contain different sets of descriptive concepts. There might be readers who recognize Franzen as the 'author of *The Corrections*', others might know him as the 'author of *Purity*'. Differences in descriptive content do not affect the identity of the FRANZEN file, though. Competent readers will share the same file type because instances of this type ought to be individuated in the same way (i.e. by being related causally to Franzen) in every case.

Readers will be in a position to entertain *singular thoughts* about Franzen just in case they possess an instance of the FRANZEN file type. This is nearly self-evident. Yet it is not entirely obvious how mental files can be involved in expressing *singular propositions* about this person. The proposed explanation is that mental files should be thought of as devices of (mental) reference which are capable to refer to persons in roughly the same way as singular expressions refer in natural language. On this account, files are mental counterparts of proper names and, importantly, are supposed to be counterparts in the semantic sense of the word. If this is so, an utterance of the statement 'Franzen is the author of *The Corrections*' can express a mental or conceptual proposition about Franzen on the basis of the referential capacity of the FRANZEN file. Like its natural language counterpart, the expressed proposition counts as singular, since the FRANZEN file is grounded on causal relations to Franzen in roughly the same way as the proper name 'Franzen' is grounded causally on Franzen.

Orlando (2017, pp. 57–58) claims, on this basis, that mental files can be regarded as a constitutive component of the semantic content of singular utterances. This has already been recognized in the relevant literature. Recanati and many others have repeatedly argued that files play the role of non-descriptive Fregean modes of presentation. Seen from a semantic perspective, files as (non-descriptive) modes of presentation perform

a complex function: they are responsible for reference fixation, for cognitive significance, and coordination of information. Orlando proposes a two-level semantics where the content of singular expressions is constituted jointly by referents and such modes of presentation. It follows from this approach that an utterance of (1) has to be interpreted as expressing a two-level content composed by (1a) and (1b):

(1) Franzen is the author of *The Corrections*.

(1a) The *singular proposition* constituted by Franzen and the property of being the author of *The Corrections*.

(1b) The *conceptual proposition* constituted by the FRANZEN file and the descriptive concept ‘author of *The Corrections*’ contained in that file.

(1a) should be familiar, as it corresponds to the Russellian conception of singular propositions. This kind of content can be evaluated with respect to truth and falsity. If Franzen possesses the property of being the author of *The Corrections*, (1a) is true. At first glance (1b) may seem superfluous, since Russellian propositions are commonly assumed to express complete sentential contents without the intervention of modes of presentation. Orlando maintains, however, that (1b) does not determine (1a), contrary to what Fregeans might think. Rather, (1b) should be taken as representing an autonomous level of content. It is a mental or conceptual content that can be associated with the utterance of (1). And given that the FRANZEN file is a non-descriptive mode of presentation of Franzen, the conceptual proposition (1b) is not general but singular.

The mental file framework supplemented with the above two-level semantics can also be successfully applied to fiction – at least Orlando says so. The first important thing to note in this regard is that one can differentiate between three types of utterance in fictional narratives. As many have pointed out, there are *fictive*, *parafictive*, and *metafictive* utterances of sentences that differ sharply from each other with respect to their contextual background.<sup>4</sup>

Consider the following examples. The first token occurrence of the character name type ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in Conan Doyle’s oeuvre is to be found in his novel *A Study in Scarlet*, page 3, line 21:

(2) “You don’t know Sherlock Holmes yet”.

Since (2) is extracted from the text of the novel, it counts as a *fictive* utterance. Now compare (2) with (3):

(3) Sherlock Holmes was complemented perfectly by Dr. Watson.

(3) can be classified as a *parafictive* utterance.<sup>5</sup> One characteristic feature of

<sup>4</sup> The currently used terminology is not uniform. For example, instead of speaking of *fictive*, *parafictive*, and *metafictive* utterances, Thomasson (2003) uses the technical terms ‘fictionalizing discourse’, ‘internal discourse’, and ‘external discourse’.

<sup>5</sup> We can make a further distinction here between implicit *parafictive* utterances like (3) and explicit *parafictive* utterances. The latter type uses prefixes such as ‘In work *W*’ or ‘According to the story *S*’. For present purposes, this distinction is irrelevant.

this type of utterance is that it is based on two narrative perspectives: (3) concerns the internal textual content of Conan Doyle's narrative but it paraphrases or restates this content from an external perspective. Metafictive utterances, in contrast, presuppose only a single perspective, a perspective that is external to the narrative.

(4) Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character.

In Conan Doyle's novel, Holmes is a detective, not a fictional character. But seen from the external perspective of literary criticism, Holmes is a fictional character. Accordingly, (4) counts as a paradigmatic metafictive utterance.

Intuitively, all of these utterances are meaningful and true either in the internal context of the novel *A Study in Scarlet* or outside of it. The observation that Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson are not real persons goes against this intuition, however. For if there are actually no such persons, then 'Sherlock Holmes' and 'Dr. Watson' are empty names, and thus utterances of such sentences as (2), (3), and (4) cannot express any proposition, which makes it hard to evaluate them as true.

This is a well-known problem that has been tackled by two main types of approach over the last decades. Realists argue that although Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson are not real persons, the Holmes character and the Dr. Watson character exist. Different brands of realism have elaborated different views on the nature of characters. Some conceive fictional characters as existing *possibilia*, others maintain that Holmes and Dr. Watson are created abstract objects and they are occasionally identified also with person-kinds existing in the same way as Platonic eternal idealities. What is common to all of these views is that they introduce an ontologically novel type of object for solving the above problem. If characters can be identified with *possibilia*, *abstracta*, or other types of objects, then character names can be taken to refer to these denizens of the world.<sup>6</sup> On this basis, realists can safely claim that utterances of (2), (3), and (4) express propositions, and are therefore true, as our intuition suggests.

In contrast, *antirealists* argue that fictional characters do not exist, and thus 'Sherlock Holmes', 'Dr. Watson' and other character names are empty. What justifies our intuition that utterances of (2), (3), and (4) are true is that by reading Conan Doyle's narrative readers imagine or assume that there are such persons as Holmes and Dr. Watson. This does not mean that utterances involving character names express singular propositions and are literally true. Such utterances are understood through an implicit paraphrase which typically takes the following form: according to an imaginative game authorized by the

<sup>6</sup> Fictive uses of character names still pose a problem for realists since tokens of 'Holmes' and 'Dr. Watson' do not refer to *possibilia* or *abstracta* or ... in Conan Doyle's narrative. Therefore, realists usually argue that character names are empty in their fictive uses but *parafictive* and *metafictive* uses can refer back to characters that are already present at the primary textual level of the narrative. On this see, for example, Thomasson (2010).

novel *A Study in Scarlet*, such-and-such is the case.<sup>7</sup> Paraphrased in this way, fictional utterances express general propositions about the imaginative game rather than singular propositions about the characters of the narrative. What is said about Holmes and Dr. Watson is thus merely imaginatively true.

Orlando rightly observes that this situation confronts us with a dilemma. One option is that we interpret utterances like (2), (3), and (4) as expressing singular propositions about fictional characters at the cost of adopting a controversial ontology of objects. The other option is that we take (2), (3), and (4) to be parts of imaginative games at the cost of losing their capacity to express propositions about particular individuals. (see Orlando, 2017, p. 62)

Orlando's main contention is that the mental file framework sketched above enables us to avoid this dilemma. By adopting this framework we can defend the antirealist theory of fictional characters and *at the same time* claim that utterances involving character names express singular propositions. The reasoning goes as follows. First, we should recognize that character names can be accounted for by the same two-level semantics as ordinary proper names. If 'Jonathan Franzen' has a referent (i.e. the person Franzen) and may be associated with a mode of presentation (i.e. the FRANZEN file), then 'Sherlock Holmes' should possess an identical or analogous set of semantic properties. The difference is, of course, that 'Sherlock Holmes' cannot be used to refer to the person Holmes since there is no such person. But then the supposed analogy between 'Franzen' and 'Holmes' disappears. Thus the second step in the reasoning consists of showing that the character name 'Holmes' should be taken to refer not to its customary referent (since there is no such thing) but to its mode of presentation (i.e. the HOLMES file). This amounts to showing that 'Holmes' is not empty even on the referential level of content. How can this be done? According to Orlando, utterances involving character names are not about the real external world. When readers talk about the protagonist of the novel *A Study in Scarlet*, they talk about something that has been created by Conan Doyle's fantasy. And it seems quite correct to assume that the products of the author's fantasy belong to the conceptual realm.

So when readers talk about the deeds and attributes of Holmes, they talk in fact about the conceptual content of the novel that was tokened first in Conan Doyle's mind. They can succeed in this only when they have a referential intention which is directed to this conceptual content. That is to say, by using the character name 'Holmes' readers of the novel must have the intention to refer obliquely to the mode of presentation of Holmes. The idea of oblique reference, of course, goes back to Frege, who once assumed that when referring expressions occur in the scope of an epistemic attitude verb like 'believe', they refer to their customary senses, not to their customary referents.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> More precisely, this is a proposal which is characteristic of the Waltonian account of fiction. The main difficulty for this view is that metafictional utterances cannot be interpreted as belonging to authorized make-believe games. Antirealists claim, therefore, that utterances like 'Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character' should be seen as unauthorized make-believe games or betrayals of authorized make-believe games.

<sup>8</sup> Here, I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out a flaw in an earlier draft of this paper.

In the case of a *fictive* utterance with a character name referential obliqueness means that a particular descriptive concept must be ascribed to a mental file. So 'Holmes' refers to the HOLMES file in (2) and the file is ascribed the descriptive concept 'is yet unknown to someone'. Since (2) is part of Conan Doyle's original novel, it can be taken to express this content automatically in the conceptual world of the narrative of that novel. Therefore, (2) comes out as true.

The *parafictive* utterance (3) requires a slightly different treatment because the descriptive concept 'was complemented perfectly by Dr. Watson' is not ascribed to the HOLMES file in the conceptual world of Conan Doyle's original narrative. If we want to find out whether or not (3) is true, we should analyse the narrative from an external perspective. It may turn out, after reading the novel, that Holmes and Dr. Watson have been portrayed by Conan Doyle as having a lot of complementary personal traits. If this is indeed the case, (3) accords with the conceptual content of the narrative. On this basis, (3) can also be judged as true.

The *metafictive* utterance (4) expresses a conceptual content that consists of the HOLMES file and the descriptive concept 'is a fictional character'. As in the case of (3), the descriptive concept is not part of the conceptual world of the original narrative. Moreover, 'is a fictional character' is a kind of content that is entirely incompatible with the internal perspective of the novel *A Study in Scarlet*. But approached from the external perspective of a reader who wants to talk about the ontological status of the character, (4) appears to be an ordinary, meaningful utterance. Orlando argues that this metafictional utterance can be accounted for by a hybrid interpretation. On the one hand, the utterer of (4) obliquely refers to the mode of presentation of Holmes. On the other hand, she ascribes a descriptive concept to the HOLMES file that does not accord with the conceptual content of the narrative. In other words, in this case, the referential shift is only partial: while the character name 'Holmes' changes its referent and refers to its mode of presentation, the predicate 'is a fictional character' retains its default semantic function and denotes the worldly property 'being a fictional character'. Thanks to this hybrid structure, (4) is partly about the conceptual world of the narrative and partly about the non-fictional world. That is why utterances of (4) can be interpreted as expressing true singular propositions.

### 3 Theory-Internal Problems

As we have seen above, Orlando's arguments are general enough to provide a satisfactory mental file framework for fiction. One noteworthy feature of the framework is that it can be applied to all types of fictional utterances. Unfortunately, despite its generality and applicability, the framework suffers from three systematic objections. Perhaps one of them may be reassuringly answered, but the other two seem to be troubling. Let's begin our survey with the weakest objection.



*Objection one: referential shift cannot be elicited by intention alone.* Orlando claims that a character name like ‘Holmes’ “seems not to refer to anybody.” (Orlando, 2017, p. 66) I guess the “seems not to refer” here is only a polite way of saying that ‘Holmes’ is an empty singular expression. ‘Holmes’ lacks a referent because there is no real detective who lives at 221B Baker Street, London, smokes the pipe, etc. Of course, readers who participate in an authorised imaginative game use ‘Holmes’ as if it were an ordinary referring name. But it is important to note that imaginative games are unable to alter the semantic profile of names. If a name has been introduced into a narrative as an empty expression, it remains empty even if it is used within an imaginative game for referring to a person. ‘Holmes’ can be taken to refer to a detective in an imaginative game not because the imaginative game endows it with a referential capacity but because it is used in that game *as if* it were a referring name. In light of this, we can contend that referential emptiness is a constant semantic property of character names.

The mental file framework suggests otherwise. It is claimed that character names undergo a semantic shift and refer to mental files in all of their uses. After the shift has taken place, ‘Holmes’ ceases to be empty and starts to refer (obliquely) to the HOLMES file. The change in the semantic profile of the character name is supposed to be elicited by a specific sort of intention. Orlando calls this intention ‘simulative’.

I find this picture rather implausible. My objection is not that this type of referential shift is in principle impossible. Indexicals and demonstratives refer via the intentions of speakers. So the content of an indexical expression or a demonstrative can be shifted by the referential intention of the speaker. This may happen even within an utterance of a single sentence. For illustration, consider a now-classic example of unbound pronouns from Kaplan’s *Afterthoughts*: “You, you, you, and you can leave, but you stay.” On Kaplan’s view, it is the directing intention of the speaker that distinguishes between the referents of the token occurrences of ‘you’. (see Kaplan, 1989, p. 589)<sup>9</sup> My objection is that the referents of character names cannot be shifted in this way. There is ample textual evidence that character names like ‘Holmes’ attempt to refer to persons. Although they do not succeed in this attempt, they are not sensitive to the changes of contextual factors like indexicals which have a two-dimensional (character/content) semantic structure. To repeat, readers of Conan Doyle’s narrative may have a specific sort of intention to use ‘Holmes’ for referring to a mental file or a mental representation but this will not yield the result that it in fact *refers* to a mental file or a mental representation.

One possible rejoinder to this objection is to point out that character names and other singular expressions are introduced into fictional narratives by simulative intentions. To adopt such a view would be tantamount to saying that character names refer to mental files from the very beginning of their

<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that whether directing intentions are part of the semantic of demonstratives or belong to presemantics or pragmatics is a subject of debate.

career. Perhaps the first token occurrence of ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in the novel *A Study in Scarlet* refers already to a mental representation. Although this token occurrence seems to refer to a person within its host sentence, this is only a surface semantic effect.<sup>10</sup> Actually, Conan Doyle introduced the name of his protagonist to refer to its mode of presentation (i.e. the HOLMES file). So the argument may go. This would be a more plausible explanation for the alleged referential shift in the semantic profile of the name. If it is correct to assume that the profile of names depends, at least in part, on the semantically relevant aspects of their introduction, for example, in the semantic or communicative intentions of their introducers, then it can be imagined that instances of a certain kind of name are designed so that they refer to mental objects. The question is whether authors of fictional works introduce character names into their narratives in this manner. Regretfully, a definitive answer would require a lengthy excursion into the cognitive/psychological theory of artistic creation, which is beyond the scope of this paper. So let us leave this question open and turn instead to the second objection.

*Objection two: character names are supposed to perform two conflicting functions in fictional narratives.* As has already been mentioned, Orlando takes character names to refer to mental files. The character name ‘Holmes’ is supposed to refer to the HOLMES file, ‘Dr. Watson’ is supposed to refer to the DR WATSON file, and so forth. On hearing this, one may ask not only ‘what is the function of mental files?’, but also ‘what type of object are they?’. Orlando says that, from an ontological point of view, mental files are mental particulars. This does not clarify, however, whether they are concrete or abstract objects. Early advocates of the mental file theory like John Perry and Jerry Fodor have argued that files are objects in the mind or objects that are instantiated in the mind. These objects were conceived of as having causes and effects in the physical world. (see Fodor, 1990, pp. 23–25; Perry, 1980, p. 330) From this, it obviously follows that mental files were identified by these authors with concrete particulars. In a footnote, Orlando says that her own approach shares the ontological commitments of Fodor’s early work on mental representation. We may assume, then, that she would answer the question ‘what type of object are mental files?’ by saying that they are concrete particulars. If my reconstruction is correct, character names are supposed to refer ultimately to concrete objects in Orlando’s framework.

But this is, so to speak, only one aspect of the framework. The other aspect is that character names are supposed to refer to or stand for something abstract. The reason for this is the following. As already mentioned, according to Orlando, utterances of sentences like (2), (3), and (4) have to be interpreted as being about “something that has been created by an author’s

<sup>10</sup> A reviewer asks why we should take for granted that the first token of ‘Sherlock Holmes’ seems to refer to a person. According to the reviewer, this is counterintuitive since both the author and the readers know for a fact that there is no real person that is Sherlock Holmes. In response, I would say that it is better to keep the distinction between ‘seemings’ and ‘facts’: ‘Sherlock Holmes’ *seems* to refer to a person because it behaves in its first occurrence in Conan Doyle’s text as an ordinary personal name. What the author and the readers know about the existence/nonexistence of the character is, in my view, an independent issue.

imagination.” (Orlando, 2017, p. 67) And the products of authorial imagination – fictional works and the characters portrayed in these works – must be seen as belonging to the realm of abstracta. This means that fictional works and fictional characters are not part of the physical world. Rather, they are identical with or part of the conceptual world that has been created by an author’s artistic activity.

By applying this line of reasoning to the case of Holmes we get the following result. The main *character* of the novel *A Study in Scarlet* is the product of Conan Doyle’s authorial imagination. The character is part of the conceptual world of the novel, from which it follows that it is an abstract object of some sort. Therefore, when the character is the subject matter of our utterances, token occurrences of ‘Holmes’ may be taken to refer to or stand for a certain abstract object.<sup>11</sup> In Orlando’s own words: “our referential intention in using a fictional name can be construed as being oriented towards something not real (in the sense of belonging in the external world) but purely conceptual.” (Orlando, 2017, p. 67)

The problem is that these two aspects of the framework are in conflict with each other. On the one hand, there is a semantic relation between the character name ‘Holmes’ and the HOLMES file. On the other, there is a semantic relation that relates ‘Holmes’ to the Holmes character. And this is something that cannot be integrated into a coherent semantic picture because ‘Holmes’ is related at once both to a concrete particular (i.e. HOLMES file) and to an abstract object. (i.e. the Holmes character)

*Objection three: the mental file framework is incompatible with the antirealist view of fictional objects.* There is a sharp disagreement between realists and antirealists on whether fictional objects exist. Realists believe that fictional objects are part of the overall inventory of what there is. This is not an innocent position because existing objects are typically thought of as being accessible through direct or indirect sensory experience; and it is fairly clear that Holmes, Dr. Watson, and their likes are not perceptible existents. Advocates of the realist view argue, therefore, that fictional objects are to be identified with a certain non-standard type of object. The most popular candidates are possibilia, created abstracta, and Platonic idealities. Fictional utterances are then interpreted as involving one of these types of non-standard objects. This ontological move saves the intuition that fictional utterances express singular propositions that can be either true or false. In contrast, antirealists are deeply convinced that our world does not contain any fictional objects. Fictional utterances appear to commit us to these objects but

<sup>11</sup> What complicates the picture is that Orlando favors an externalist conception of reference. On this conception, reference is *per definitionem* a relation to an “external” object. So it can be said that ‘Holmes’ *stands for* an abstractum, but it is incorrect to say that ‘Holmes’ *refers* to an abstractum. Not everyone shares this view. A well-known exception is to construe the relation of reference on the basis of negative free logic (Sainsbury 2005), which allows reference without referents. But there are also other alternatives. For example, Burge (2010) and Davies (2019) argue for a non-relational way of referring that can be successfully applied to abstract objects. Unfortunately, Orlando’s framework does not take into consideration these developments.

from the antirealist's point of view, this is what it is: an appearance. We are willing to accept the existence of these objects because we entertain the utterances of fictional narratives by participating in authorised imaginative games. Accordingly, fictional utterances are to be taken to express true propositions about persons like Holmes or Dr. Watson only in an imaginative sense.

Orlando's mental file framework was designed to demonstrate that the antirealist theory of fictional objects can be reconciled with the claim that fictional utterances express propositions that are not imaginatively true, but instead true in the real world. But the framework cannot fulfill this promise.

There are at least two reasons for this. First, Orlando rejected the realist approach to fictional objects on the grounds that it embraces a non-standard ontology. One would expect, then, that her own approach is based on a standard ontological theory. Can mental files (i.e. concrete mental particulars) be incorporated into a standard classification scheme of objects? Although Orlando and other followers of Perry and Fodor find it self-evident that mental files constitute a natural kind, ontologists disagree with them on this point. The classificatory difficulty arises from the fact that mental objects of this type are "hybrid" existents, which satisfy the standard criteria both of concreteness and abstractness.<sup>12</sup> So it is not quite correct to suggest that the antirealist view of fiction can readily be paired with the mental file framework because both have equally parsimonious ontological commitments.

Second, and more importantly, it can be pointed out that the central claims of the mental file framework are incompatible with the antirealist view. While Walton (1990), Everett (2013), and other antirealists argue forcefully against the existence of fictional characters, Orlando seems to take an opposite view. She contends that if readers want to talk about the protagonist of a fictional work, then their referential intention is directed to *something* that belongs to the conceptual/abstract realm. And, on her view, this conceptual/abstract *something* exists contingently: it comes into being through an author's storytelling activity. But this is precisely what certain advocates of fictional realism claim. Artefactualists can happily accept that the protagonists of fictional works do indeed exist and that they can be classified as abstract objects.<sup>13</sup> Artefactualists can also agree with the claim that objects of fictional narratives like Holmes or Dr. Watson exist only contingently. Their abstract nature does not exclude that they are created objects. Many other products of our cultural activity come into being in a similar way: laws, institutions, marriages, etc., are paradigmatic abstract objects, but they do not and could not exist without the intervention of human intentional activity. This indicates rather clearly, I think, that Orlando's mental file framework is much closer to the artefactualists' position than it is to the antirealist view.

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of this issue, see McGinn (1980).

<sup>13</sup> The first systematic elaboration of the artefactualist position is to be found in Thomasson (1999). For a new version of the artefactualist view, see Vecsey (2019).

#### 4 Mental Files from the Perspective of Fictional Realism

In the previous section, I pointed out that when we apply the mental file framework to the theory of fictional objects in a way similar to Orlando's, then the result will suffer from various theory-internal problems. A minor problem is that the framework assumes that the semantic profile of character names can be modified deliberately. Perhaps when authors introduce the names of their protagonists, they use these names from the outset as referring to something mental. Perhaps at least *some* of them use character names in this way. But this assumption needs empirical validation. Orlando's two-level semantics generates however a more serious problem. According to this view, character names are related both to mental files thought of as concrete particulars and to characters conceived of as being abstract objects. It is hard to see how this tension might be resolved within the proposed framework. It is also hard to see how the basic principles of the two-level semantics can be reconciled with the antirealist view which holds that there are no such things as fictional objects. The semantics has been so constructed that it allows for character names to be used referentially. Clearly, antirealists cannot tolerate this semantic claim, since it entails that character names do have referents and this means, ontologically speaking, that there are fictional objects.

In this last section, I will discuss briefly a possible way out of this theoretical impasse. As we have seen, fictional antirealists are in a difficult theoretical situation, because they have to reconcile two apparently incompatible theses. The first is a definitory claim. It says that it is a constitutive feature of mental files that they store and manage information/misinformation about objects. The second is the core ontological claim of the antirealist stance on fiction, which says that fictional objects do not belong to the overall inventory of what exists. The simplest and most often used antirealist strategy for reconciling these two claims is to adopt the Waltonian model of fiction and argue that fictional works should be conceived as prescriptions to imagine. Readers of fictional works have to imagine that things are in a certain way, for example, that Sherlock Holmes is a detective who lives at 221B Baker Street, London. It can be said, then, that although there are no fictional objects in reality, such objects feature in our imaginative acts and states. When readers collect and store information/misinformation about the protagonists of fictional works, their attention is directed to what should be imagined about these protagonists (i.e. the informational content of their own imaginatory acts and states). According to the resulting view, there is no obstacle to open mental files about merely imagined objects: even though Holmes lacks real existence, readers take it for granted, based on what they imagine, that "he" is an existing person.<sup>14</sup> In the end, files about spatiotemporal objects are supposed to differ from files about fictional objects only with respect to their type of reference. While reference is acquaintance-based in the first case, it is merely imagined in the second case.

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that Hansen and Rey (2016) sympathize with this view, but they argue for a mental file theory that is *neutral* with respect to whether the objects of the files are actual things or not.

Despite its *prima facie* plausibility, I do not consider the antirealist's explanatory strategy to be successful. The reason for skepticism is rooted in the very starting point of that strategy. In particular, it seems misleading to say that mental file theory in itself requires reconciling incompatible theses about fiction. I do not want to reject the definitory claim according to which mental files store and manage information/misinformation about objects. But I do think that the antirealist's ontological claim can be rejected, at least from the perspective of our everyday literary practices.

The question is whether we have access to the informational contents of literary works (i.e. literary texts) in the way antirealists assume. Is it really correct to say that imagination is our most direct and privileged epistemic relation to the textual level of works? I think the adequacy of the imagination-based conception is bounded by a more fundamental epistemic constraint: in order to imagine that a particular object *o* is so-and-so, we must already be acquainted with the text of a literary work which represents *o* linguistically as being so-and-so. This precondition may justly be thought of as a strong constraint because it narrows down the possible ways in which we may come to know of *o* to those that involve our language-based capacities. We simply need to read and process the relevant passages where *o* and its distinctive properties are portrayed. Imagination can only be activated after these passages have already been understood.

One might object that the epistemic priority argument does not undermine the antirealists' position because they may still argue that, even though our access to the contents of literary works must be mediated by language, fictional persons and events exist only in imagination. But the epistemic priority argument is more powerful than antirealists may think it is because it has an ontological consequence. If the text of a literary work represents *o* as being so-and-so, and our primary access to *o* is mediated by language, then our thought and talk about *o* should be taken as ontologically committing. By thinking and saying that Holmes is a detective we are committed to those representations, be they structurally simple or complex, that have the content or convey the information that *Holmes is a detective*.

A fictional realist *who follows this line of thought* may add that there is nothing more to being Holmes than being the content of these representations. The realist's general ontological point is that each fictional person can be identified with a specific set of representations. More precisely, the claim is that fictional persons have to be considered as embodiments of sets of interdependent and interconnected linguistic representations. 'Embodiment' stands here for a mental operation which binds separate but related representational elements into particular unities. We readers perform this operation rather easily when reading different passages of literary works. It does not take much reflection to recognize that scattered property descriptions like *is a detective*, *is a pipe-smoker*, or *lives at 221B Baker Street, London* belong to the same set of Holmes-representations in Conan Doyle's detective novel, *A Study in Scarlet*. The effective working of this operation is based, at least partly, on the fact that property descriptions of this type are capable of conveying informational

content. We understand perfectly well what it means to say that someone lives at 221B Baker Street, London. We understand this, even though the property description *lives at 221B Baker Street, London* lacks a language-external representatum.<sup>15</sup> Fictional realists may add, again, that this holds for informational contents in general: linguistic structures which are representation apt in literary works represent their target objects without being related to the language-external world.

In this regard, realists may rely on a conceptual distinction which was initially stated by Nelson Goodman (1968). In analysing the issues of pictorial representation, Goodman argued that 'represent' may occasionally be taken as an unbreakable one-place predicate. Many artistic pictures represent existing objects, Goodman says, but there are also pictures that do not represent anything. A picture of a unicorn is one of these cases. Yet to say this sounds a bit paradoxical. What could it mean that a picture does not represent anything and yet is a picture of a unicorn? If 'represent' has to be interpreted as a two-place predicate with an argument place for objects, then the paradox cannot be resolved. We ought to talk about a particular object and attribute properties to it when we want to talk about a representation. A way out is to recognise that a picture representing a unicorn is unicorn-representing-picture, or, for short, a unicorn-picture, not a picture of or about a unicorn. This helps mitigate the paradoxical effects of the statement that although there are no unicorns, there are pictures that represent them. Although Goodman's main target was the problem of nonexistence in pictorial representations and he was obviously not a realist with respect to the ontological status of fictional creatures such as unicorns, his conceptual innovation seems to be easily transferable to the linguistic domain. The crucial point lies in the following distinction: non-fictional representations are normally *representations of objects*, where 'represent' should be interpreted as a two-place predicate; in contrast, fictional representations are *object-representations*, where 'represent' should be interpreted as a one-place predicate. Thus, while the former have a world-relational structure, the latter are thoroughly non-relational.

Coming back for the last time to Conan Doyle's main protagonist, it is essential to understand the order of explanation that is characteristic of the above-sketches approach. First, the epistemic priority argument states that our primary access to Holmes is mediated by language. We do not have, and cannot have, any language-independent knowledge about this fictional character: there are simply no exclusively perceptual means for recognising and identifying "him". Second, in reading Conan Doyle's novel we come to know that the text represents Holmes in a great variety of ways. More accurately, we come to know that the text contains a large number of property descriptions that have a common feature: all of these descriptions provide some partial information about one and the same protagonist. On that basis, we unify the descriptions under the label 'Sherlock Holmes', and then identify the character with this representational unity. In other words, we recognise that Holmes

<sup>15</sup> At the time the novel was written there was no such address as 221B at Baker Street.

embodies this representational unity. And third, relying on the Goodmanian distinction between the contrasting types of representation, we associate with the character the semantic property of non-relationality. That is, we regard the unified and embodied property descriptions as providing us with a Holmes-representation, instead of a representation of Holmes. In this way, we can emphasize that in order to understand the mode of operation of the character name 'Holmes' there is no need to relationally refer to the facts and state of affairs of the language-external world.

The overall picture that arises from these short observations offer us three important lessons for the present context: (i) the imagination-first based approach to the problem of fictional objects is not mandatory; (ii) contrary to the antirealist doctrine, fictional objects do exist; and (iii) by applying the notion of non-relational representation, one can save the intuition concerning the informativity and understandability of literary texts. If this picture is correct, as I think it is, then realists can explain the possible connection between the theory of fictional objects and the mental file framework more easily than antirealists do.

Given that realists acknowledge the real, not only imagined existence of fictional objects, they can make use of the notion of mental file to provide an explication of how we store and manage information/misinformation about such objects, and this may be done in more than one way. They could argue, as above, that mental files have the function of binding together non-relational linguistic representations that readers gather from their reading experiences. (Vecsey, 2019) Alternatively, they may argue that fictional objects are created types and that readers refer to purported tokens of such types through mental files. (Terrone, 2017) Or they may claim, from the perspective of Discourse Representation Theory, that fictional objects are vicariously anchored entity representations that are stored in files. (Kamp, 2015) There are also other related options which take non-relationality as a property of purely intentional representations (Rey, 2003), or as a property of concepts. (Sainsbury, 2018) Which of these options is the most appropriate for the mental file framework depends, of course, on further details of the realist's view, but an in-depth discussion of this issue would require another paper.

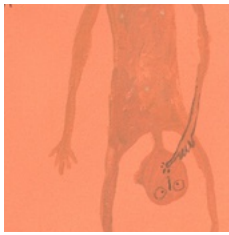
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**SYMPOSIUM.  
BANALITY, AESTHETICS  
AND EVERYDAY LIFE**

# Everyday Heritage and Place-Making

Lisa Giombini

In this paper, I combine sources from environmental psychology with insights from the everyday aesthetics literature to explore the concept of ‘everyday heritage’, formerly introduced by Saruhan Mosler (2019). Highlighting the potential of heritage in its everyday context shows that symbolic, aesthetic, and broadly conceived affective factors may be as important as architectural, historical, and artistic issues when it comes to conceiving of heritage value. Indeed, there seems to be more to a heritage site than its official inscription on the UNESCO register. A place is included as part of our heritage primarily because it matters to us. People live in, form relationships with, and derive existential and affective meanings from it. Above and beyond its official significance, a heritage site is thus a living dimension that plays a vital role in the everyday life and social practices of people, who transform it into a place of human significance. | Keywords: *Everyday Heritage, Place-Making, Familiarity, Everyday Aesthetics*

## 1. Introduction

At its core, the notion of cultural heritage is typically taken to mean something special, unique, and outstanding: ruins of a glorious and distant past, sublime landscapes, buildings of immeasurable beauty and artistic appeal. Cultural heritage refers to the most valuable things our ancestors have bestowed upon us, the gifts that past generations have offered to their present and future descendants. Not by chance, in many European languages the English term ‘heritage’ is translated with the Latin ‘patrimonium’ a noun originally indicating the estates or assets that were transmitted from father to son (see for example *patrimonio culturale* in Italian or *patrimoine culturel* in French). Heritage is regarded as our family treasure, a treasure that can be disputed by different family members (see e.g. Young, 2007), but whose exceptional significance is hardly put into question.

Consider now the concept of *everydayness*, to which this Symposium is dedicated. At first glance, there seems to be no notion as remote from and unrelated to the exceptionality of cultural heritage as that of the everyday. The Oxford English Dictionary defines everydayness as what is “commonplace and

ordinary”. Everyday are all objects, practices or activities that lack particular significance or have lost it over time because of daily abuse and redundancy. Repetition is indeed the generative law of everydayness (see: Lefebvre, 1991; Lefebvre and Levich, 1987). Like a word that loses its meaning by being uttered too many times, everyday life is reiterated again and again, and as a result of this over-exposure, it is rendered empty, boring, and trivial. This relates to the second key notion in this Symposium, namely, *banality*. Much of our daily life is banal in the sense that it is based on habitual and humdrum routines that are deprived of “new or interesting qualities” by their constant recurrence.

What, then, does cultural heritage have to do with everyday life, given that the former identifies all that is most special, significant, and non-banal in our culture, while the second captures only mundane, trivial, and trifling things in its scope? Isn’t the very combination of heritage and everydayness intrinsically paradoxical? My intuition is that there are in fact some compelling reasons to keep these two seemingly contradictory concepts together. This paper aims to unveil these reasons and show how profoundly they affect the way cultural heritage is actually experienced and perceived.

## 2. Top-down and Bottom-up Processes of Heritage Creation

To substantiate my argument, it seems important to clarify first of all the procedures that underpin the creation of ‘official’ cultural heritage (Harrison, 2013, p. 23). Notice that by ‘official heritage’, I will refer here uniquely to those sites that are recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites. There is however a distinction between UNESCO and other non-official national or regional heritage (Matthes, 2018). Although not or not yet being classified as world heritage, these sites can actually play an influential role in cultivating a sense of national or local identity (Ireland and Schofield, 2007, p. 2). Nevertheless, for reasons of space, I will leave discussion on this point to future work.

How does a site come to be officially included on the UNESCO World Heritage List? From a technical point of view, the selection process is managed by a body that represents the sovereign state of the territory in which the site exists, and is submitted to a committee (the UNESCO World Heritage Committee) in charge of evaluating the nominations. To be considered, sites must be of “outstanding universal value” (for discussion, see: Cleere, 1996) and satisfy at least one out of ten selection criteria, some of which purely aesthetic. These include for example “representing a masterpiece of human creative genius”; bearing “a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared”; containing “superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance”, and so on<sup>1</sup>. Once a certain place is recognized as successful in this sense, it is inserted on the official heritage register and starts to be subject to a series of provisions on how it should be treated differently from other places. In particular, it is expected that the site

<sup>1</sup> The complete list is available here: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>.

be accurately managed and maintained, and funds are allocated for this to occur both by local and international institutions.

What I have just described is the standard procedure by which a site receives recognition and is placed on the UNESCO heritage register. It is a *top-down process* (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2009; 2013), in which values and meanings are formally attributed to a place through an institutional act of acknowledgement.

There is, however, an important sense in which heritage sites are more than mere items on a catalogue. As I argued at the beginning, for a place to count as cultural heritage in a substantial sense it must be *perceived or experienced* as a site of human value – it must matter to individuals and communities, and possibly to the entire humanity. In this sense, the notion of heritage only makes sense in relation to some individuals or groups of individuals who perceive it as significant (Smith, 2006, pp. 46-48).

A relevant question in this regard is how this perceived heritage significance has to be understood. One way to do this, I contend, is to imagine that there is an intangible “web of meanings” (Muñoz-Viñas, 2009, p.160) ‘wrapping’ around the tangible objects – buildings, places, constructions. Each heritage site is indeed surrounded by a series of immaterial aspects (the language we use to describe it, its cultural significance, the role it plays in mundane routines, etc.) which are crucial to determine how the site is perceived or experienced (Giombini, 2020a). In particular, a site’s perceived significance seems to reside on its being a *reference point* by which certain social groups understand themselves in relation to the environment around them. Heritage sites function in this sense as landmarks for people, and contribute to shaping their ways of knowing, making sense, and valuing their everyday experience.

While I shall return to the issue momentarily, let me put special emphasis here on the ‘everyday’ character of this experience. It is indeed through everyday practices that heritage significance is generated at the local level. Following Harrison (2009, p. 8), we can refer to this process as the *bottom-up process* of heritage creation, whereby the notion of ‘bottom-upness’ stands for the grassroots mechanism through which some environments are invested with significance by the people who inhabit them.

#### 4. Making Places

In recent years, the analysis of the grassroots relationships that link people to their living places and the function these places fulfil in their lives has been the subject of numerous researches in the field of environmental psychologists. Their empirical studies have shown that places strongly influence how people self-represent themselves and their relations with a territory. This sentimental bond is known as “place attachment” (see, among the many: Fried, 1963; Gerson, et al., 1977; Low and Altman, 1992; Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001).

In broad terms, place attachment can be defined as the affective rapport, link or involvement between people and specific locations of their everyday life

(Low and Altman, 1992), which develops over time and often without awareness. According to many authors, place attachment is an integral part of identity-creation processes, both for individuals and members of cultures and communities (Raymond, et al, 2010). How we inhabit an environment, and the practices we perform in our daily life, express and shape who we are. Place appears in this sense as a psychological more than a physical dimension, permeated by the “variety of meanings associated with that location by individuals or groups.” (Devine-Wright, 2009, p. 427)

Importantly, everyday practices play a key role in the place-making process. A locale becomes a befitting part of a person’s individuality and starts to serve as a *symbol* of the self (Proshansky, 1978) through daily intercourse. When settings are imbued with the personal meanings of quotidian life, they are transformed into a symbolic extension of our mind, landscapes become ‘mindscape’, and spaces become ‘places’. The role of quotidian experience in the process of place-making has been highlighted by psychologist Graham Rowles (1983; 1984) in his analysis of the notion of “place insideness” (Relph, 1976). According to Rowles, to be ‘inside’ a place is to belong to it and to identify with it so that the more ‘inside’ a person is with respect to a place the stronger she will identify with it. Importantly, this sense of insideness is both physical and social as it is autobiographical; it is the awareness of living within a familiar setting with its associated routines; within a context of community life and social exchange; and within a landscape of personal memories. In combination, these three aspects strengthen our emotional attachment with a place, which leads us to the feeling that we “wear the setting like a glove.” (Rowles, 1983, p. 114)

As of today, there still is no agreement among scholars over what kind of places people mainly develop attachment to, or what physical, social, and temporal variables influence attachment. What is perhaps more interesting to our purposes, however, is that it has been demonstrated that heritage sites represent strong purveyors of attachment feelings (Avrami et al., 2000; Byrne 2001; Smith et al., 2003). Indeed, these sites seem to be deeply embroiled in the construction of personal and group sentiment. As I have argued elsewhere (Giombini, 2020b) ‘heritage’ in itself may be seen as a mechanism of place-making. The very transformation of a place into heritage is a process whereby collectivity is shaped, and feelings of belonging are created and reinforced in the interaction with an environment. Importantly, these feelings are not wholly dependent on the official values of the site itself but are rather generated collectively through the everyday interaction between people and the environment.

## 5. Everyday Heritage

As discussions on place-making testify, while considering the perceived heritage value of a site it is therefore crucial to ponder the meaning it embodies for a certain community, its everyday ‘uses’ as well as how it is perceived as a resource for the local people to meet their own economic, social, personal, and emotional needs. This brings me to the core of my argument.

Construed as a place in this complex sense, a heritage site can be seen as a sort of ‘catalyst of everydayness’ for people, a ‘unifying hub’ that creates and organizes everyday spatiality for community life, and comes to be evaluated by residents through its functionality and uses more than through its historic or official value. This social and lived-in dimension of heritage is what I refer to as ‘everyday heritage’, borrowing the term from Mosler (2019). Rather than identifying a particular kind of heritage places or items, the everyday heritage concept stands for the complex sum of practices, activities, and meanings by which communities quotidianly use all types of local heritage to strengthen their connection to particular places and each other. Heritage everyday dimension is all the stronger, however, when the site is a public space, as it happens for example in the case of many urban heritage complexes. What makes these sites especially relevant is the fact that they are always present in people’s everyday routine. Unlike other types of heritage, we do not have to go anywhere to see them (e.g., to a museum), for they are already there, shaping our quotidian experience. For this reason, throughout history, urban heritage structures, organically embedded into the city fabric, have been adapted to a variety of social, physical, and cultural uses and have contributed to model the urban social and spatial morphology.

Some examples may be helpful to illustrate my idea. One of the contexts in which everyday heritage is more clearly instanced is the case of historical villas or urban gardens. Consider for instance the *Pincian gardens*, in Rome (Italy), located between Piazza del Popolo, Villa Medici, and the so-called Muro Torto. Laid out in 1809-14 by Giuseppe Valadier, the official heritage status of the garden resides in its numerous monumental furnishings, including fountains, small temples, and a famous belvedere. The site’s everyday heritage significance, however, lies in the set of practices surrounding its use by a wide range of people, including many children, who gather there to meet, stroll, and perform their daily activities. It is important to notice that these two aspects of the site are not in contrast with each other, but rather interact and contribute together to shape the users’ experience, reinforcing the sense of place identity and belonging. So, for example, the ‘official heritage’ elements in the Pincian landscape (statues, architectures, fountains) guide and direct people’s everyday movements in the park and facilitate navigation of the space, while providing a sense of time and a distinctive character to the site as a historic space.

Another example of everyday heritage, formerly proposed by Mosler (2019, p. 7), is related to the old fortifications surrounding many cities throughout Europe [Figure 2]. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these often-ruinous constructions were regarded as an annoying legacy of the past, hindering traffic roads from being widened and preventing the development of modern cities (Hirst, 1997). After their recognition and conservation as urban heritage, however, city walls started to play an important role in the life of the cities not just as important tourist attractions, but also as part of the everyday commute for the local inhabitants (Erkan and Ceccarelli, 2017). Today, historic walls are often open to the public as elevated walkways, allowing users to experience the city landscape from above and creating connectivity among

different urban districts. As uninterrupted pedestrian routes for walkers, they produce a sense of “spatial order and continuity” through the act of moving through a linear space (Wunderlich, 2008). Moreover, green public spaces are often enclosed between the intramural and extramural areas, offering people an everyday destination for their leisurely stays. This is for example the case of Dubrovnik City Walls (Croatia) [Figure 1] where the garden designed on the site in the nineteenth century is now a pleasant outdoor environment for local people and visitors (Mosler, 2019, p. 8).

Other significant examples of everyday heritage include ancient railway stations, which are often endowed with architectural as well as practical value (e.g., Porto’s train station, In Portugal), ancient cafes and restaurant (e.g., the *Café Procope* in Paris, France) and old marketplaces that are still in use today (e.g., the *Grand Bazar* in Istanbul, Turkey). Although I won’t analyse these examples in-depth, what is important to me is that these and other similar everyday uses of heritage highlight the vital interplay that obtains between place, heritage, and people and demonstrate the ways through which historical sites can shape and reshape urban everyday life.

## 6. Aesthetics of the Familiar

An interesting aspect in this regard is that there seems to be a close relationship between the emergence of heritage everyday significance and the site’s perceived aesthetic features. Aesthetic considerations appear to play a central role in the process of heritage place-making, reinforcing attachment, and strengthening feelings of belonging in the local population (Jaśkiewicz, 2015). Clearly, by mentioning aesthetics, I am not simply talking about the supposed “outstanding aesthetic value” (either artistic or natural) required from a site for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage register. Instead, I am interested in the enlarged construal of aesthetic quality that has been developed in recent work in the area of everyday and environmental aesthetics, and that considers quotidian intercourse, relationship, and interaction central for the ascription of aesthetic values to objects and places.

One major achievement of contemporary investigations in these newly established fields, I think, has been to highlight that our personal relationship with and our stake in a certain object, rather than being irrelevant or pernicious, are in fact crucial for the ascription of aesthetic character to it (Berleant, 1992; Saito, 2007, 2017; Brady, 2003, 2008; Leddy, 2005). There is indeed an extent to which the aesthetic dimension of objects only emerges when we are involved in, engage, and interact with them in our daily experience. Rather than a disinterested judgment, the attribution of aesthetic value can be thus seen as an experience of pleasure and meaning that results when a special bond is established between a subject and an object. This idea lies at the basis of the *engaged* aesthetic approach that everyday aestheticians defend (for discussion on the notion of aesthetic engagement, see especially: Berleant, 1992).



Many compelling arguments have been offered by contemporary aestheticians to support the claim that our aesthetic appreciation cannot be dissociated from the personal, as well as cultural and societal interest we have in objects. Particularly regarding the natural and built environment, their analyses have demonstrated that our appreciation of its aesthetic character cannot be detached from the personal rapport we have with it (Berleant, 1992; Brady, 2003, 2014;). Perception of aesthetic value in the environmental context has been proven inseparably linked to how we feel in a given place and to the meaning we give to it, which indicates the existence of a significant *affective component* in our appraisal of places (Brady, 2003). In this sense, whether we are native to a particular locale, having lived and worked there our whole life, or just tourists passing by, deeply changes how we perceive its aesthetic character and what kind of aesthetic experiences we undergo (Benenti and Giombini, forthcoming).

Because of space constraints, I cannot focus here on any of these arguments, but I want nonetheless to spend some words to illustrate a proposal that seems particularly relevant for the account I am trying to defend. I am notably referring to Finnish philosopher Arto Haapala's account (2005; 2018) of place appreciation in the everyday context. According to Haapala, in everyday life there are two basic modalities through which we can relate to a place, what he calls 'strangeness' and 'familiarity'. Strangeness is the basic experience we undergo when we find ourselves in a new environment, for example when we visit a foreign city for the first time, and we feel lost in a maze of extraneous buildings and streets (Haapala, 2005, p. 43). Familiarity, on the contrary, is the quality possessed by our everyday living environments – our home, our district or our living area – with their distinctive features and identifiable aspects. When we have settled down into a locale, Haapala claims, not only do we recognize the buildings and spaces, but we also establish an intimate bond with them, which brings us a feeling of "comforting stability" (Haapala, 2005, p. 50). Familiar elements in the landscape and known architectural spaces have indeed the role of "stabilizing factors" (Haapala, 2018, p. 171) in the unfolding of our daily routines. Importantly, this role, according to Haapala, also has a significant aesthetic component to it, not in the sense that some qualities in these landscapes or spaces surprise us or take us "somewhere else from our everyday" (*ibid.*), but exactly because these familiar places are able to secure that our everyday life rhythm flows smoothly and unproblematically.

Haapala's reference is Heidegger's famous examination of everyday tools and pieces of equipment in his *Being and Time* (1962, p. 98). As Heidegger explains, while these items are always present in our daily existence and make our quotidian activities possible – the computer I am using right now, the chair on which I lean, the room in which I sit – we hardly pay attention to them: they are "phenomenologically transparent" to us (Wheeler, 2019). What is interesting, however, is that these objects, in Haapala's account, not only have practical importance for our way of inhabiting the environment but are also endowed with a special kind of "silent beauty" (Haapala, 2018, p. 181). This beauty, in turn, is capable of engendering a distinct form of aesthetic pleasure, which

relies on such objects being always “ready to our hand” and continuously fulfilling the function they are created for. To use Heidegger’s standard example, we are talking here about the kind of aesthetic pleasure that the carpenter, while engaged in trouble-free hammering, may take in the hammer, nails, and work-bench she is using, exactly because such items allow her to be a carpenter and therefore act out her peculiar mode of being-in-the-world. To the same extent, if we go back now to the environment case, familiar places, according to Haapala (2005, p. 50), give us aesthetic delight inasmuch as they are ‘there’ for us, accompany our mundane routines, and enable us to be ourselves. Of course, this delight is as much aesthetic as it is existential because it depends on a certain state of wellness that is linked to the realization of our existential structure (Light, 2005, p. xi).

## 7. Heritage Values

Haapala’s consideration of the interactions between aesthetic and existential aspects in the process of place appreciation provides further support to the heritage picture I have canvassed so far. Particularly when it comes to culturally significant settings like heritage sites, the importance of the interplay between affective, aesthetic, and existential elements should not be ignored. All these factors contribute to a similar extent to make a site appreciated and valued at the local level. So, whereas the specific architectural, artistic, and structural features of a place are key for the attribution of UNESCO status to it, the happenings of the everyday are key for the formation of feelings that are responsible for, and constitutive of, the place’s everyday significance.

This is not to say that the two sets of values can be thought of as wholly independent from each other, or even less as mutually incompatible. On the contrary, I think that if heritage has relevance for humanity it is exactly because of its ability to bring these two different dimensions together. On the one hand, heritage sites are culturally and aesthetically significant in themselves; they represent the best and most special achievements of human culture and, thus, inevitably stand out from the flow of the everyday. On other hand, as we have seen, these sites also shape our daily life, provide spatial stability and social order, create a sense of temporal continuity for individuals and communities, and give people aesthetic pleasure through comfort and familiarity. The value of heritage, therefore, lies both in its everydayness, in its capacity to form and give substance to the routines of our days, and in the power it has to draw us out of the daily humdrum. Although one may be tempted to regard the latter type of value as more important than the former, I hope to have shown that there is in fact a role for both of them as well as no convincing reason to dismiss either of them.

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, let me briefly come back to the main topic of this Symposium for some more personal considerations. As I pointed out at the beginning of this

paper, everything *can* and *does* become banal by way of continual repetition. Even the greatest of buildings and the most spectacular architectures eventually lose their attractiveness when we see them every single day. For me driving past it almost every morning to go to work, the Colosseum is but a big, mundane thing; an obstacle that I have to turn around to go where I have to go. But that doesn't mean that I care less about it, on the contrary! The Colosseum has become so to say a part of the furniture of my inner self; its reiterated presence one of the few certainties I have in my life. To a similar extent, I am sure that even the beautiful Helen may have eventually appeared ordinary to Paris, once he had to wake up next to her every single morning in the well-walled city of Troy. And yet, as history teaches us, isn't it for the sake of these everyday, familiar, and even banal things that people have been most ready to fight, wars have been waged, and empires have been made and unmade?

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[Figure 1. Bratislava City Walls. Photo by the author. November 2018]



[Figure 2. Dubrovnik City Walls. Photo by the author. August 2012]

# Everyday Heritage and Aesthetics: A Reply to Giombini

Adrián Kvokačka

In this short paper, I examine the notion of everyday heritage as developed by Lisa Giombini in her article *Everyday Heritage and Place-Making*. While I argue that the article's main contribution is to combine the literature on place-making with current debates in everyday aesthetics, I also highlight some of the issues that I think should be addressed to further refine the notion of 'everyday heritage' and make it more resistant to criticism. | Keywords: *Cultural Heritage, Everyday Heritage, Everyday Aesthetics*

Cultural heritage is one of the most complex topics to be addressed in the field of humanities, aesthetics included. This is partly due to the fact that heritage is of interest to a striking number of scholars from several different scientific perspectives, and partly to the fact that so much has already been written on the issue. Finding an original way to approach the notion may seem in this sense a rather challenging undertaking. Difficulties notwithstanding, Lisa Giombini has recently been dedicating much effort in her works to examining some of the complexities of the notion of heritage (Giombini, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). The paper she presented for the current Symposium adds a small piece to the picture she draws in these previous writings.

But is this picture really successful in enlarging the scope of the discussion?

As I will argue in the remainder of this commentary, I think Giombini's attempt is successful at least in bringing some fresh air to contemporary discussions. What Giombini does in her paper - combining different sources to defend what she calls a "bottom-up heritage approach" - seems to me a very sensible thing to do. In particular, I think that using sources from the current literature in everyday aesthetic may actually add a whole new layer to our consideration of cultural heritage. As renown, a vital stream of debates and discussion takes place today under the heading of everyday aesthetics, and a remarkably large number of phenomena have already been analysed by philosophers working in the field. Investigating cultural heritage through the

lenses of everyday aesthetics can thus be promising and can even lead to a better understanding of what lies at the core of the “intangible web of meanings” (Giombini, 2020d, p. 52) that I think surrounds all objects, and not just heritage sites.

Furthermore, I concur with Giombini’s intention of proving that even from the notions of banality and everydayness – that we generally construe as radically detached from our heritage concept – we can nevertheless draw some well-grounded position on the topic.

As Giombini states at the end of her paper, heritage sites work in two ways. On the one hand, these sites stand out from the flow of our everydayness, and this is why they are inscribed on local, national or UNESCO registers as exceptional outcomes of human culture. But heritage sites also ground our feeling of being home, reinforce our cultural attachment, and stimulate the arousal of feelings that are, as Giombini claims, “responsible for, and constitutive of, the place’s everyday significance.” (Giombini, 2020d, p. 57) While heritage’s former aspects have been extensively discussed in the literature, also with an eye to the obvious aesthetic potential, the major contribution of Giombini’s paper is, I think, to put emphasis on the latter kind of ‘everyday’ aspects, that are responsible to ground the ‘bottom-up’ approach. In order to do this, Giombini offers several arguments and examples that attest our daily care for cultural sites. In this regard, she argues that heritage sites are reference points for individuals or social groups who perceive them as significant; and that once such attributions are made these sites engender a process of “place attachment” or “place-making”, which is strengthened by different kinds of everyday practices (for example in the context of public gardens, city walls etc.). Heritage sites, she claims, make us feel accustomed to a locale and fit to a place (and vice versa) and contribute to our hominess feeling, broadly conceived. And although scholars still do not agree on how to conceive of this process, we know for sure that heritage sites “represent strong purveyors of attachment feelings” (Giombini, 2020d, p. 53).

Although I am sympathetic to the general picture, I have some doubts about the strength of these feelings when it comes to particular situations, like for instance in the case of the Colosseum example mentioned at the end of the paper. In these cases, this type of feelings is weakened by the site’s quotidian presence in our life. So perhaps the emotional significance of attachment should be reconsidered. For instance, emotional involvement may be strong in the case of tourists who discover a place for the first time and take special intellectual or sensual pleasure in its beauty, but local people’s emotional reaction may be attenuated by repeated frequentation with the site.

Without entering into details of this discussion, what is more interesting is that while drawing evidence of these processes from the environmental psychology literature and from everyday heritage findings, Giombini also combines them - in a fruitful way, I think - with theories from the everyday aesthetics field. Importantly, all these theories originate somehow from Berleant’s “aesthetics of engagement” (Berleant, 1991), an account in which Kant’s notion of disinterestedness is challenged and replaced by a notion of



subjects' involvement when experiencing everyday life objects (I shall return to this issue soon). Emily Brady's idea of a "significant affective component" (Brady, 2003) in aesthetic experience and Arto Haapala's notion of "comforting stability" (Haapala, 2005) both contribute, in Giombini's reconstruction, to give ground to an alternative understanding of cultural heritage, opposed to the official top-down one. In this sense, as Giombini writes, heritage sites, like commonplace objects: "give us aesthetic pleasure inasmuch as they are 'there' for us, accompany our mundane routines, and enable us to be ourselves." (Giombini, 2020d, p. 57)

While I strongly agree with this idea and see especially Haapala's position as really compelling to the argument Giombini is trying to defend, what seems misguided to me is the reference to Berleant's unfair critique of Kant's notion of disinterestedness, a critique that has been taken for granted by most everyday aestheticians and that Giombini too adopted as an argumentative claim in this paper. As I've tried to show in my own work (Kvokačka, 2018, 2020), Kant's aesthetic theory in the Third Critique may prove in fact to be quite able to embrace everyday aesthetics within its scope once we abandon the usual reading of the concept of disinterestedness. This is not the right place to illustrate in detail how consistent and even beneficial Kant's aesthetic theory may be for investigations into everyday aesthetics, but, to support my claim, let me quote how Thomas Leddy, the well-known everyday aesthetician, answers to a question he himself raises in one of his recent papers: "How can disinterestedness play a role in appreciation of nature or everyday aesthetic phenomena?" (Leddy, 2017). He writes:

"Metaphorical seeing or seeing charged by the imagination plays a role both in interested and in disinterested attention and [that] the main role that disinterestedness plays is simply as a method for highlighting certain sensuous and formal features and freeing up the imagination from the dominance of historical features, allowing for actualizations of the aesthetic object in new ways." (Leddy, 2017, p. 77)

As Leddy seems to imply here, a reconception of Kant's aesthetic notions may represent a crucial breakthrough for discussions in everyday aesthetics.

In conclusion, and going back to Giombini's paper, I have a few broad observations that I think could add some perspective to the picture Giombini is trying to draw. In the first place, I wonder whether the bottom-up approach of heritage creation, which is somehow opposite to what we can call 'tourist way' of experiencing heritage, may not be interpreted as a way to give further relevance to local or national heritage lists that are often underestimated compared to the UNESCO one. Giombini mentions this issue at the beginning of her paper, but she does not deal with it. I am sure that this could represent a fruitful starting point for some further investigations. Moreover if, as I think, this bottom-up approach is not merely a theoretical account, but one that is grounded in the practice, then it may be worth exploring its implications for the way we preserve, conserve or otherwise manage our cultural heritage.

Another important issue concerns the relations between everyday heritage and cultural heritage. What I observe is that Giombini assumes that the two

notions should be thought of as present in each instance of a heritage site. It seems possible, however, to think about some examples of sites in which these two values do not meet with each other and actually remain unrelated. What shall we think of heritage items that do not allow everyday uses, like archaeological sites or sites that are otherwise protected, closed or inaccessible to the public? Of course, they can still work as 'landmarks' but shouldn't we also acknowledge the fact that to 'live close' to a site is different than to walk inside its 'walls'?

These questions are not to be understood as a criticism but rather as some suggestions to develop a position that, as I said, seems to me potentially fertile to help us rethink the problem of heritage in a different light and from a broader philosophical perspective.

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# Pragmatists on the Everyday Aesthetic Experience

Alexander Kremer

Although the first ‘pragmatist aesthetics’ was devised by John Dewey in his *Art as Experience* (1934), Richard Shusterman has been the only scholar to use the notion of “pragmatist aesthetics” in his *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (1992). In this paper, I show that Dewey already refuses the gap between the practices of the ‘artworld’ and that of everyday life. In *Art as Experience*, he criticizes the ‘museum conception’ of art to argue that some aesthetic experiences in our daily life have the same essential structure as the experience of art. While Rorty has revised Dewey’s basic premises, Shusterman has rather restated them. Since the end of the 1980s, he has started developing his own philosophical project, named ‘somaesthetics’. Shusterman’s somaesthetics does not simply incorporate many Deweyan views, but also develops them further. Accepting a Deweyan framework, Shusterman rejects the sharp dualism of the so-called “lower and higher levels of art”. What is more, he considers philosophy as an art of the living, embracing in somaesthetics the ancient Greek and Asian traditions. | Keywords: *Pragmatism, Dewey, Rorty, Shusterman, Aesthetics, Everyday Life*

## 1. Introduction. Pragmatism

Everyday life has already been significant for pragmatist philosophers from the very beginnings of their movement. Even banality, in the sense of commonplace, might be attractive within a pragmatist approach. My aim in this paper is to investigate the contribution that pragmatism – both in its traditional form and its current reinterpretation – can bring to the question of the aesthetic value of our everyday and ordinary life. With this aim, I will firstly outline the history of pragmatism from its nineteenth-century foundations and I will then focus on one of the most interesting perspectives in contemporary pragmatist aesthetics, namely Richard Shusterman’s ‘somaesthetics’.

As is renown, pragmatism is an original American philosophy, flatly opposed to European philosophy. Pragmatism has never been a canonized philosophical movement but amounts to a loose group of erudite scholars who lived according to similar values and principles. Traditional pragmatists were

radically oriented towards practice. For example, they interpreted life as problem-solving, and considered everything as a tool, including scientific and philosophical theories. Truth is for pragmatists what is good for the community, i.e., what is useful and has a function. This is why, among other theories of truth, as for instance the theory of correspondence and the theory of coherence, the pragmatist theory of truth has never researched the ultimate metaphysical or epistemological 'Truth'.

Pragmatists also adopt various forms of naturalism. With the exception of Rorty, most pragmatists support a form of radical empiricism. They are also anti-essentialists and pan-relationists. Meliorism can also be included within the common features of this philosophical movement.

It is possible to distinguish between an Old and a New Pragmatism or, to put it differently, between traditional and neo-pragmatism. Among the representatives of traditional pragmatism, the most important ones are Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), the founder of pragmatism, who was an excellent logician and practiced a form of semantic pragmatism; William James (1842-1910) who was born into a wealthy Irish family in New York and was the older brother of Henry James, the prominent novelist, and of the diarist Alice James. James attended the best schools in Europe and New York, taught physiology, psychology, and philosophy at Harvard and created a form of 'practical pragmatism'. Finally, John Dewey (1859-1952) who authored many books and articles about many timely issues, and always took part in the life of his community as a teacher, social critic, or political activist.

After a break of forty years, in 1979, Richard Rorty (1931-2007) founded neo-pragmatism, by also causing an awakening of traditional pragmatism. Among neo-pragmatists, Rorty mentioned Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, Robert Brandom (1950), and Richard Shusterman (1949). Today, many people are still working in the framework of traditional and new pragmatism. These movements constitute an active dimension of contemporary philosophical life. We can speak of at least three different schools of pragmatism.

*The neo-classic pragmatists* (e.g., Larry Hickman, Susan Haack, John McDermott, John Ryder, Jacquelyn Kegley, Kenneth Stickers, James Campbell), who combine adherence to naturalism with the importance given to scientific methods. They see themselves as the truest intellectual heirs to Peirce, James, and Dewey.

*The analytic pragmatists* (e.g., Robert Brandom, Huw Price, Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, and the young Rorty also belonged here), who take the linguistic turn with deadly seriousness and see the future of philosophy in a combination of pragmatism with analytic philosophy.

*The post-analytic pragmatists* (e.g., the late Richard Rorty, Daniel Dennett, but Richard Shusterman also belongs to this group), who do not insist on the importance of an analytic approach, to which they prefer the analytic style, but take strongly into account the development of continental philosophy in the 20th century, such as phenomenology or philosophical hermeneutics. They preserve however some basic pragmatist principles.

In the next sections, I will review the main implications that Dewey's and Rorty's thought may have for aesthetics and the philosophy of art. I will then move on to analyze Shusterman's philosophical approach to show that his somaesthetics can be regarded as a turning point for the history of contemporary pragmatism in its dealings with everyday life.

## 2. John Dewey (1859-1952) and his philosophy of art

Dewey's pragmatism was influenced by Darwinism and the American Civil War (1861-1865). Dewey always describes the individual in human being - environment transactions. His views are also featured with radical empiricism, which is connected to tools, induction, and experiments, according to an approach that can be referred to as a 'science-centered' thinking. For decades after World War II, Dewey was more influential in the field of educational theory than in the area of pragmatism and Dewey was also a Socialdemocrat politically.

In several points in his work, Dewey discusses what he calls the 'museum conception' of art. Briefly, the idea is that, on the one hand, people remove works of art from their historical and cultural contexts; on the other hand, they pile up works of art in art galleries and museums, which become symbols of the public or private 'greatness'. The 'museum conception' of art, according to Dewey, is a historical product, and more specifically, a product of capitalism that Dewey condemned. Contrary to the representatives of 'Erlebniskunst' who wrote about the contradiction between art and practical reality (like Schiller in Gadamer's opinion (see Gadamer, 2006, p. 71)), Dewey thought that this contradiction between real life and art is unnecessary.

In his philosophy of art, Dewey interprets art as embedded into the practice of human life. Everyday life and its experience, what he calls "anesthetic experience", are according to Dewey mostly incomplete, random, fragmentary, and chaotic. For example, think of a typical morning when we are rushing to work, but we are already late, and it turns out our child has a fever, plus our mother-in-law calls us at the same moment, etc.

However, the aesthetic experience, what Dewey calls the "consummatory experience" or, simply "an experience" is unified, integrated, harmonious, and satisfactory - although it can have either a positive or negative value. Nevertheless, in Dewey's opinion, everyday life experience always contains the possibility of an aesthetic experience ("an experience"). A nicely laid table, a game of chess, a becomingly furnished flat, a beautiful building, sublimity of the mountains or the sea: all these objects can give rise to an aesthetic experience. As Dewey (1987, p. 42) puts it:

A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation.

It means that the unified, integrated and satisfactory everyday-life experiences are already aesthetic experiences, and they are also able to offer aesthetic consummation even in daily life. In Dewey's opinion, experience already contains a form of understanding, which makes it crucial for both artistic creation and aesthetic appreciation. To the same extent, art should not be thought in contradiction with everyday life.

### 3. Richard Rorty's (1931-2007) neo-pragmatism and his philosophy of art

In 1967, Rorty published *The Linguistic Turn*. In the introduction, he wrote on the meaning and significance of the linguistic turn in philosophy and replaced the notion of experience with that of language.<sup>1</sup> In 1979, Rorty published his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, where he criticized analytic philosophy but didn't yet formulate his own ideas. This only happened in 1989, in a book entitled *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. After this philosophical turn, Rorty initiated a political turn: from being a Trotskyite, he became a liberal ironist thinker, although it must not be forgotten that the American "liberal" means "Socialdemocratic" in Europe. He described the *public-private split* and depicted the *liberal ironist type* of human being. As he writes: "Liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do," (Rorty, 1989, p. xv) and

I use 'ironist' to name the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires – someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance. (Rorty, 1989, p. xv)

Rorty also gave rise to a utopia of liberal democracy and referred to the so-called "Strong Poet", who is the creator of new social vocabularies.

If we switch now on Richard Rorty's aesthetics, we can say that Rorty takes the linguistic turn in dead earnest, which is why, in his philosophy of art, he deals only with literature, where he addresses everything that promotes the realization of his own ideas of liberal democracy in the public sphere and of personal development, in the private one: Emerson, Whitman, Dickens, Orwell and Bloom, Kundera, Nabokov. One can consider as an example the Nabokov-chapter and the Orwell-chapter in the *Contingency* book. As a good pragmatist, Rorty also handles literature as a tool, just like he does with economy, science, philosophy, etc.: everything is for him a tool from a practical and moral point of view. Thus, after having its aesthetic value, that literature is 'right', that promotes his purposes in the public and the private dimensions of life. It means both the literature that shows the conflict between the rich and the poor and the literature that shows the richness of human life forms and socio-political possibilities.

Rorty did not address other branches of art. One main reason for this is the fact that, as we have already mentioned, he refused to attribute a central role to experience in his neo-pragmatism, since he considered experience as a sort of metaphysical residuum.

<sup>1</sup> Notice that we are much before the so-called "pictorial turn" (Mitchel, 1994).

#### 4. Richard Shusterman (1949) and his somaesthetics

Born on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1949 in a middle-class Jewish American family in Philadelphia, Richard Shusterman moved to Israel at the age of 16, where he settled down and continued his studies. He specialized in English, literature, and philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he got his BA in English and philosophy and his MA in philosophy. During his studies, Shusterman became interested in analytic philosophy, to continue his research work in the field of analytic aesthetics in Oxford, where he defended his Ph.D. thesis work at St. John's College. This thesis resulted in Shusterman's first book, *The Object of Literary Criticism*, published in 1984. After 1984, Shusterman taught at different Israeli universities, until he got a tenure position at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He was a guest professor for a year at Temple University in 1985, but in 1986 he moved back to the US, Philadelphia, where he became tenured professor in 1988 and then chair of the Philosophy Department between 1998-2004. Based on his personal experiences and his philosophical readings, Shusterman later questioned his initial adherence to analytic philosophy. Symptoms of this can be observed in his second book *T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism*, from 1988. Starting from that date, Shusterman became a pragmatist and started to work out his own aesthetic project on the basis of John Dewey's "esthetics," namely, *somaesthetics*.

In the international context, Shusterman became famous after the publication of his book *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (1992), which has been translated into a dozen languages. In his subsequent works, Shusterman strengthened his philosophical position<sup>2</sup> and further developed the pragmatist tradition, which provoked both significant criticism and enthusiasm in professional circles. From 2004, Richard Shusterman became a philosophy professor at the Florida Atlantic University and the director of the *Center for Body, Mind, and Culture*, which helped him to spread the movement of somaesthetics on a global level.

Shusterman's general theoretical standpoint is a philosophical aestheticism that is saturated with democratic political intentions. This is manifested in his naturalistic somaesthetics, which is colored by pragmatist meliorism, namely, by the idea that society should be democratized as much as possible. As a matter of fact, Shusterman started his academic career with an analysis of interpretation. His general theory of interpretation is a "meta-theoretical interpretive pluralism," where practice is not determined by theory, but the challenges of practice are able to show new interpretive development directions. If, as Shusterman states, understanding and interpretation are parts of human way of life, then we live in a permanent self- and world-understanding and in a permanent self- and world-interpretation. Importantly, as much as it has our life and being as its objects, this self- and world-understanding become philosophy. This happens all the way down in Shusterman's somaesthetics, since the self is always embodied for Shusterman,

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *Practicing Philosophy* (1997), *Performing Live* (2000), *Surface and Depth* (2002), *Body Consciousness* (2008), *Thinking through the Body. Essays in Somaesthetics* (2012), *The Adventures of the Man in Gold* (2016).

that is, the *soma* always has a prominent role in his philosophy. This is why, contrary to Rorty, Shusterman insists on the importance of experience and non-conceptual understanding.

Having summarized Shusterman's neo-pragmatist position, we can turn to our next question. Why has this naturalistic philosophy of art got the name of "Somaesthetics"? On the one hand, we can consider our body as 'the tool of tools.' On the other hand, only a living, vivid body can have a central place in philosophy. Interestingly, many languages, including Hungarian, do not distinguish clearly between the living, vivid body and the dead body. However, this difference is clear in the German language: the former is what the German call *der Leib*, the latter is what they refer to as *der Körper*. In this sense, while the *Leib* is the living, vivid body, the *Körper* means the dead body in the physical sense.

In the ancient Greek language, the expression *soma* meant the living, vivid body, an expression which Shusterman combined with the word 'aesthetics' to create the notion of 'somaesthetics'. At first, Shusterman consciously and intentionally called this naturalistic philosophy of art 'pragmatist aesthetics'. This is interesting, because Shusterman was actually the first philosopher who intentionally used the expression 'pragmatist aesthetics'. Dewey, indeed, never used it.

According to Shusterman, there are three different roots in somaesthetics.

The first one is constituted by John Dewey's philosophy. As Shusterman mentions in one of the interviews I conducted with him: "[...] by the end of the 1980s, he (Dewey) was my principal pragmatist inspiration." (Kremer, 2014, p. 8)

The second source is ancient Greek philosophy. As Shusterman (2014) writes:

from my study of the ancient (Greek) idea of practicing philosophy as an embodied way of life rather than simply a merely theoretical academic pursuit of reading and writing texts. We should always remember that Socrates established philosophy not by writing any books or articles (for he authored none) but by his exemplary way of living and dying in the search for the wisdom to guide the quest for the good life.

The third source is represented by ancient Asian ideas, which he considers essential:

*The idea of philosophy as an embodied way of life is also prominent in ancient Asian thought; somaesthetics has been especially inspired by Asia's rich tradition of deploying somatic disciplines for philosophical and spiritual enlightenment along with better health and harmony.*" (Shusterman, 2014, p. 4)

As he claimed in the same interview:

Confucius for his emphasis on embodiment and pleasure and the importance of the arts for the ethical aim of self-cultivation in which the self and its cultivation are always seen as essentially socially constituted through one's relations with others rather than being narcissistically autonomous." (Kremer, 2014, p. 10)



Before defining Shusterman's theory of somaesthetics and examining its structure and intentions, it is important to notice that Shusterman mainly developed Dewey's naturalistic philosophy of art and brought together those historical and present thoughts and practices dealing with the *soma*. Shusterman's somaesthetics can indeed be seen as:

the critical meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aesthesia) and creative self-fashioning. In examining the forms of knowledge and disciplines of practice that structure such somatic care or can improve it, somaesthetics involves the critical study of society's somatic values and comportment, so as to redirect our body consciousness and practice away from the oppressively narrow and injurious stereotypes of somatic success that pervade our advertising culture and to focus instead on exploring more rewarding visions of somatic value and fulfillment and better methods for attaining them." (Shusterman, 2012, pp. 182–183).

It is clear that the *soma* is both intended in a *subjective* and in an *objective* position. The "creative self-fashioning" is thus both external and internal, where the latter term is connected to the psychosomatic phenomena of pleasure, excitement, stress, and depression. Shusterman's democratic meliorism wants to consciously influence society with his somaesthetics. At the same time, somaesthetics represents a permanent Self- and World-Understanding and a form of pragmatist meliorism. The somaesthetics enterprise can be divided in three sectors:

- a) an analytic somaesthetics, meant as a theory, which explains the nature of our bodily perceptions and practices and underlines their role in our knowledge and construction of the world;
- b) a pragmatic somaesthetics, meant as a method, which explores specific ways of somatic improvement and their comparative critique;
- c) a practical somaesthetics, meant as a practice, which disciplines bodywork aimed at somatic improvement.

It follows already from this classification of somaesthetics that Shusterman deals with our everyday life from an aesthetic point of view. Otherwise, he would not mention the methods of somatic improvement. What is more, his practical somaesthetics shows that Shusterman's focus is not only theory, but that he wants to improve our everyday life activities in a real practice.

## 5. Conclusion

That Shusterman accepts the existence of an aesthetic experience in everyday life is beyond question. This can be easily inferred from the definition of somaesthetics mentioned above as well as from his ideas concerning the genealogical roots of the discipline itself. It is also evident that he understands aesthetic experience as a very broad concept which is present even in daily routines.

Genealogically, somaesthetics has its roots in philosophy and more particularly in pragmatist aesthetics. Somaesthetics emerged from the following two ideas. 1. Because the body is crucial both to the creation of art and to its appreciation, a pragmatist approach (which also means a meliorist approach) to aesthetics should try to improve the body's perceptual and performative capacities so that it can improve our aesthetic experience. 2. Moreover, *because pragmatist aesthetics, as I conceive it, is also centrally concerned with the ethical art of living and because the body is the necessary medium through which we live, then it follows that a pragmatist, meliorist approach to living should work on cultivating our key tool or medium of living, namely our soma.* These two philosophical arguments, which originally inspired the idea of somaesthetics, continue to inspire it and to shape the approaches of non-philosophers who are working in this field. [...] *I believe that philosophical thinking is not confined to professional philosophers with Ph.D's in this subject.* This brings me to a further point about the somaesthetics-philosophy relationship. If we conceive *philosophy broadly as an ethical art of living that is guided by critical inquiry aimed to promote a more aesthetically satisfying form of life for both self and society,* then the various disciplines and forms of knowledge that contribute to this art of living (even if they are not distinctively or professionally philosophical) can be related to the broad philosophical project of the quest for wisdom in how to live better lives. Somaesthetic research in forms outside the normal disciplinary bounds of philosophy surely can contribute to this overarching philosophical project." (Kremer, 2014, pp. 10–11)

Looking at the genealogical roots of somaesthetics, it emerges clearly that for Shusterman everyday life activities are not inferior to artworks in providing us with an aesthetic experience. Shusterman interprets philosophy as "an ethical art of living": which means that he also handles his soma and life as an artwork. The aim, as he puts it, is "to promote a more aesthetically satisfying form of life for both self and society". My contention is that somaesthetics' contribution to this broad philosophical project can be absolutely crucial.

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# Somaesthetics and Banality: A Reply to Kremer

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This short paper is an attempt to intersect my reading of Alexander Kremer's key ideas in his article *Pragmatists on the Everyday Aesthetic Experience* (2020) with my previous thoughts on banality as an aesthetic quality experienced by the modern subject in her everyday life. My contribution tries to interconnect key theoretical and artistic conceptions of banality (as discussed for example by Charles Baudelaire, Hannah Arendt, Marie Darrieussecq, Edward Keinholtz) with Shusterman's somaesthetics and subsequently to reveal another possibility of rethinking the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. | Keywords: *Pragmatism, Somaesthetics, Banality, Everydayness, Insensitivity, Visual Art*

## 1 Introduction

Learning is never over because not only there is room for further refinements and extensions of the acquired skill, but also because we so often lapse into bad habits of performance or face new conditions of the self (through injury, fatigue, growth, aging, and so on) and new environments in which we need to correct, relearn, and adjust our habits of spontaneous performance. (Shusterman, 2009, p. 138)

It is my honour to present here my comments on Professor Alexander Kremer's paper *Pragmatists on the Everyday Aesthetic Experience* (2020). Kremer is a leading figure in the field of contemporary European pragmatism studies. Based at the Philosophy department of the University of Szeged, in his research Kremer is mainly concerned with neo-pragmatist aesthetics and ethics with special focus on Richard Rorty's and Richard Shusterman's philosophical concepts (see Kremer, 2016). Kremer is also Editor-in-chief of the journal *Pragmatism Today: The Central-European Pragmatism Forum*, which has been published since 2010.

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Professor Kremer's argumentation in this paper can be divided into two parts. The first one is a historical survey and comparative explanation of the different branches of American pragmatism from Dewey and James, to Rorty and Shusterman. As we can see, Kremer outlines Dewey's approach to art theory, everyday experience and specifically, the social role of art education (Dewey 1934). The second part – which articulates the key aim of the paper – is an explanation of Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics as a continuation of Dewey's thoughts on 'experience' and art. The brief insight into Rorty's neopragmatism consists of the linguistic turn in his approach and his concept of the "liberal ironist" (Rorty 1989). In the explanation of Rorty's theory of art, the author stresses his pragmatist approach and understanding of literature in terms of "social utilitarianism".

Much room in Kremer's paper is devoted to Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics. Kremer interestingly visualises Shusterman's key notes on somaesthetics with photographs from Gunther von Hagens' famous exhibition *Bodyworlds* (2010). This pictorial supplement, highlighting muscles, bones and 'corporal tectonics', reminds us of Shusterman's pursuit of "body awareness". As he effectively explains in comparison with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenologist approach:

If Merleau-Ponty aims to recapture a primordial unreflective perception that is universal and 'unchanging' and that is needed as the essential ground for explaining all other perception and performance, my pragmatist approach is more sensitive to differences in somatic subjectivity and instead aims to explore and enhance our behaviour by rendering more (though not most or all) of it more explicitly conscious and reflective so that our perception and performance can be improved. (Shusterman 2009, p. 139)

Shusterman's path from the analytical tradition (during his Israeli studies) to American pragmatism is well-known but interesting to remember. In comparison with Richard Rorty, Shusterman has built his concept of somaesthetics on Dewey's aesthetics in *Art as Experience* (1934) and has created the concept of his aesthetics of pragmatism<sup>1</sup>. Subsequently, he stimulated the establishment of the international movement of somaesthetics. In addition, as Kremer points out in his paper, Shusterman's general theoretical standpoint is a form of philosophical aestheticism which is saturated with democratic political intentions and coloured by pragmatic meliorism. In Shusterman's theory of interpretation, the core is self-interpretation, which means interpretation and understanding into the embodied 'self', the so called 'soma'. "This is why, contrary to Rorty, Shusterman insists on the importance of experience and non-conceptual understanding." (Kremer, 2020, p. 71)<sup>2</sup> Shusterman's concept of 'soma' is the vivid, living body, which occupies a central position in aesthetics.

<sup>1</sup> In recent Slovak writings on the work of Shusterman's somaesthetics, Lukáš Makky (2018, pp. 169-171) has provided a useful analysis of Shusterman's ideas in reference to John Dewey's, Jan Mukařovský's, Alexander Baumgarten's, and Michel Foucault's approaches towards aesthetic experience.

<sup>2</sup> In this regard, Kremer (2020) underlines the absence of a distinction between the notion of "body" and "corpse" in Hungarian. In Slovak as well, the word "telo" is used to indicate both the living and the dead body.

In order to better understand somaesthetics, Kremer's paper offers a system of three pillars as its theoretical base: Dewey's pragmatist art theory (arguing for a so-called museum concept of art); ancient Greek practice of philosophy as an embodied way of life; finally, ancient Asian (Daoism and Confucianism) tradition of deploying somatic disciplines for philosophical and spiritual enlightenment along with better health and harmony.

Apart from understanding the "soma" as a "locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation" [...], somaesthetics involves the critical study of society's somatic values and comportment" (Shusterman, 2012, pp. 182–183 quoted in Kremer, 2020, p. 72). In a recent presentation, referring to Shusterman's *Thinking through the Body* (2012, p. 182-183), Kremer describes somaesthetics as follows:

In examining the forms of knowledge and disciplines of practice that structure such somatic care or can improve it, somaesthetics involves the critical study of society's somatic values and comportment, so as to redirect our body consciousness and practice away from the oppressively narrow and injurious stereotypes of somatic success that pervade our advertising culture and to focus instead on exploring more rewarding visions of somatic value and fulfilment and better methods for attaining them. (Kremer 2020)

With respect to the last argument, I would like to extend somaesthetics to the problem of the mindless, unreflected perception of self, as well as to the unreflected psycho-somatic transformations of the self caused by dull everydayness or by the everyday experience of banality.

## 2 Discussion

While my concern in reference to the topic of this symposium (*Banality, Aesthetics and Everyday Life*) is the aesthetics of the banal aspects of everydayness, in the remainder of this paper I would like to examine possible connections among concepts of banal, everydayness and somaesthetics. There are "side effects" of modernity: industrial boredom, repetitive everyday acts and one's experience of dullness, banality and mindlessness. I consider "the banal"<sup>3</sup> as an important part of a 'modern life experience' discourse. During the 19th and 20th century, its meaning has been shifted, and recent usage of the notion contains morally defected, or even evil connotations.

In my earlier text on banality as an aesthetic quality experienced in everyday life and in many strategies in contemporary visual art (Migašová 2016, pp. 33-45), I argue that there are crucial theoretical concepts of banality, which definitively influenced our understanding of the word. Increasing number of theoretical reflections on banality is proof of the intensified significance of the phenomenon. Apart from Baudelaire's reflection of banality as a constituent of the word 'chic' and 'eclecticism' in reaction to *Le Salon De 1846*, I find the most important explanation of banality in Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in*

<sup>3</sup> The origins of the word date back to mid-18th century. The term, originally related to the feudal service, indicated something 'compulsory'. The root of the word comes from the French *ban*: 'a proclamation or call to arms', ultimately of Germanic origins (see: [www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com](http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com) 2020).

*Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963, p. 357). She brilliantly points out that it simply was not diabolical evil what permeated the soul of the main 'holocaust administrator', Adolf Eichmann: rather, it was the "banality of evil", distance and alienation, anesthetization caused by non-reflective everyday acting, machinery of bureaucracy, perfect and dehumanized paperwork, which, in the end resulted in the biggest catastrophe of the 20th century. "The Moloch", "the beast" was born in the realm of very modern human inventions.

As an art theoretician, let me bring into this discussion two examples from the realm of art, which represent, in my opinion, artistic manifestations of bodily and psychical deformations caused by human experiences with banality, apathy (as a form of insensitivity) and mindlessness. The first one is an example from the realm of literature – *Les Truismes (Pig Tales)*, a novel by Marie Darrieussecq (1996). The main heroine of the novel slowly, almost unnoticeably turns into a pig. *Pig Tales* reveals deformative metamorphosis of the human / female body<sup>4</sup> as a consequence of unreflected everyday acts and mindless compromises even with violent aggressors. Contrary to Franz Kafka's comparable *Metamorphosis*<sup>5</sup>, Marie Darrieussecq tells us a story of slow and long, but definite transformation, or better said – disintegration of the body.

My second artistic reference is Edward Kienholz's famous installation *Beanery* (1965)<sup>6</sup>, which facilitates intense experience of banal existence. It represents the interior of the average 1960's American bar, featuring smells and sounds of the bar and various types of customers, all of whom have clocks on the faces with the time set at 10:10 pm. The entire work symbolizes the killing of time: "Kienholz has noted that time is suspended in the installation to underscore the escapism of the bar's clientele; as he stated, 'a bar is a sad place, a place full of strangers who are killing time, postponing the idea that they're going to die.'" (*Edward Kienholz Artist Overview and Analysis*, 2015) To my understanding, the artwork is a perfect exemplification of *ennui* – the experience of brutal boredom with underlying melancholy.

I consider banality as an expressive quality of communication, which is constituted of repetition, emptied figures of communication<sup>7</sup> and consequently, alienation of the communicants. I assume the alienation is a modus of one's relation not only to the others, but mainly to the self. Both artworks aesthetically communicate bodily deformation, disintegration and ugliness as an aesthetic ramification of the long, slow process of experiencing

<sup>4</sup> See the figure: Cover of *Pig Tales: A Novel of Lust and Transformation* (Source: The New Press, <https://thenewpress.com/books/pig-tales>. (Accessed: 6 December 2020).

<sup>5</sup> See the figure: Mendelsund, P. (1995) Cover of *The Metamorphosis: And Other Stories*. The Schocken Kafka Library. Available at: <http://commonreads.com/book/?isbn=9780805210576> (Accessed: 6 December 2020).

<sup>6</sup> See the figure: Kienholz, E. (1965) *Beanery* (assemblage / environment / installation). Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/collection/1019-edward-kienholz-the-beanery> (Accessed: 6 December 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Either verbal or pictorial. For some pioneer reflections on this problem, see: Leon Bloy's *Exegese des Lieux Communs* (1902).

banality. They can be understood as artistic proof of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, or let me say, ability of making choices.

To conclude, these notes on banal lead me to the issue of mindlessness from Shusterman's point of view. As he puts it

[...] the pervasive value of unreflected habits in our perception and action do not entail that these habits are fully adequate and do not need correction through a process involving critically reflective awareness of what those habits are. [...] Unnoticed bad habits exercise a horrible power over action, thought and will. (Shusterman 2009, p. 135)

Moreover, as he points out, we need to reconstruct our habitual modes, as well as pay careful attention to the self. Careful attending to self, I think, logically must be, at the same time, careful attending of what one perceives. Let me quote again:

Bringing unreflective habits into more explicit consciousness is useful not only for correcting bad habits but also for providing opportunities for unlearning problematic patterns of behavior and for stimulating new thinking that more generally increases the mind's flexibility and creativity, even in terms of enhancing the plasticity and efficiency of the brain's neural networks. (Shusterman 2009, p. 135)

Let me close this brief discussion with a suggestion and an invitation. In light of the aforementioned thoughts, I believe that an examination of the aesthetics of banal, with its existentialistic background, can represent a much relevant topic for somaesthetics. On the one hand, as I have tried to show, the principles of alienation and insensitivity may find fertile conceptual ground in current discussions in somaesthetics. On the other hand, they can also lead somaesthetics to better account for the complex relationships between everyday experiences, sensibility and the transformations undergone by the living body or 'soma', which in turn can be beneficial to foster cooperation between somaesthetics and everyday aesthetics.

The temporal dimension of everydayness; the form of repetition and multiplication; the notions of urban living, mechanization and institutional distance: all these phenomena may create a new, stimulating research framework for the aesthetics of pragmatism.

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# Living with Urban Everyday Technologies

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New and complex technologies are exceedingly present and in widespread use in contemporary cities globally. The urban lifeworld is saturated with various applications of information and computing technologies, but also more rudimentary forms of technology construct and create the urban everyday life as we know it. Many forms of urban technologies are perceived first through their everyday aesthetic qualities: how they look, feel, sound, or are otherwise encountered within the streetscape. Philosophical aesthetics, however, has tended to overlook everyday technologies as a topic, often due to unquestioned ideas of how a city should ideally look and feel. Thus, a more realistic approach to contemporary cities is needed, in which the deep-seated role of technologies is recognized and the experiences related to their entangled uses become acknowledged. This paper brings together recent developments in urban aesthetics with some of the core ideas of postphenomenological approaches to new urban technologies.

| Keywords: *Urban Aesthetics, Technology, New Technologies, Urban Everyday, Everyday Aesthetics*

## 1. Introduction

The urban everyday took an unexpected turn in the Spring 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing restrictions to social activity. An opportunity to think and rethink the ways in which cities are used has presented itself, at the same time as struggles for health and survival are taking place. The individual tragedies and collective traumas cannot be justified, but we should try to make something of meaning out of this period of time in the history of the human civilization. The pandemic is not, of course, without predecessors, but never before have humans lived in such concentrated forms as in the current urban environments globally. How these thoroughly human environments are planned, built and used, is of significant consequence to the quality of life, social justice as well as individual experience and well-being.

Aesthetics might not have been considered to be at the forefront of the discussion on urban planning and development. However, aesthetic thinking

has in one form or another always been at least implicitly present in urban design and planning (Lehtinen, 2020). The philosophical and applied urban aesthetics today combine various useful approaches and theories to study a range of phenomena from cityscapes to the urban experience and from urban mobility to city branding. As one of the latest turns in this development, I am proposing that the insights from philosophy of technology, with emphasis on ethics and postphenomenological approach in particular, would need to be brought to the centre of attention in philosophical urban aesthetics. In this article, I aim at showing why and in which ways we could start studying more systematically the profound effect of technological development to different already recognized facets of urban aesthetics.

The motivation for this technological update of philosophical urban aesthetics is linked to an attempt to acquire an overall more realistic view of what contemporary cities are like, to what extent they are similar and in which ways they differ from one another. This should be the aim also for developing the philosophical urban and everyday aesthetics of the future years. In practice, this will mean that the deep-seated role of technologies becomes better acknowledged as an important part of the urban perceptual and experiential realm, ranging from large-scale entities such as infrastructure to small-scale personal use of e.g. navigation apps. This will mean also that the representations, narratives, and experiences related to their entangled uses become studied as a central part of our understanding of what the city as a socio-political and processual entity is and what forms it gets through conscious human activity.

## 2. New Technologies and the Aesthetics of the Urban Everyday

New exceedingly converged and complex technologies have become increasingly present and in widespread use in contemporary cities globally. At the same time, the implementation of many types of emerging technologies is being prepared. The urban lifeworld is already saturated with various applications of contemporary information and computing technologies, but also more rudimentary forms of technology construct and create the urban everyday life as we know it. The different types of roles technology plays in everyday human experience has been studied in detail in the postphenomenological branch of contemporary philosophy of technology through the notion of technological mediation (e.g. Ihde, 1990; Verbeek, 2005; Verbeek, 2016; Lehtinen and Vihanninjoki, 2020). In philosophical everyday aesthetics, however, there has been a tendency to overlook technology as a topic (Naukkarinen, 2019; Lehtinen, 2020). This might be due to nostalgic and romanticized ideas of how a city should ideally look and feel but there might be also other paradigmatic reasons for why technology as a topic has been difficult to discuss.

As the relatively new field of everyday aesthetics has emerged only during the past 15 years, one would assume that different types of technologies and the mundane daily interactions with them would have been a central topic of study

from the beginning. However, there has been surprisingly little efforts towards this end. As one of the exceptions, Ossi Naukkarinen writes tentatively about “how computers and computational approaches are changing our everyday aesthetics” (Naukkarinen, 2019, p. 181). Although networked computing technologies and their effect on the daily life is without a doubt on the increase, I claim that we cannot understand this effect without taking a closer look on the chains of technologies and their uses that have already become naturalized in the profoundly technologized everyday life. By this, I am referring to a certain degree to earlier, more rudimentary technologies that have enabled human collective life as we have become accustomed of knowing it already for decades or even centuries.

Choosing the *urban* environment as the central case helps obviously to narrow the range of observed technologies. It, however, also shows how the individual citizen is linked to a larger group of other societal actors through the intricate use of technologies, no matter how personal and private they might seem. Focusing on the urban lifeworld (Madsen and Plunz, 2002) makes it explicit that even though technology is certainly often a source of clear subjectively experienced aesthetic impulses, the realm of technology is first and foremost intended to facilitate the many interactions between people, between people and their environment, and, exceedingly, between people and complex processes comprised of non-human elements in the urban sphere.

It is possible to group contemporary urban technologies to three main groups according to their aesthetic qualities and effects. The first group is the most obvious one, and one that many urbanites would probably think of if asked about the technologies that they interact with in their everyday life. These types of urban technologies refer to those which are perceived first and foremost through their perceivable qualities: how they look, feel, sound or are otherwise experienced directly within the streetscape. This link to aesthetics can lead to treating them mainly through their *object*-quality instead of delving deeper into their quality as complex technological objects, as something which have an ulterior purpose beyond their mere appearance. In fact, they might even function largely outside the object-natured and material ‘base’ which is drawing conscious attention by its noticeable perceptual features. With everyday technologies, examples are found in most basic types of technological objects such as traffic lights, which nonetheless are part of a network and broader logic of traffic control. An individual dweller does not usually think about why the lights are changing at the precise moment when they are changing and neither is that knowledge needed to cross the street successfully. However, basic knowledge of the local synchronization of traffic lights is perceived by most adults crossing the street and many learn to take justified risks based on this knowledge. Even though perceptually attuned to pay attention to the signalling lights, one does not need to always comply with the rules set visible by the traffic lights if one can individually assess the risk of avoiding a collision with a vehicle of any type. The larger context of traffic flows is, however, not thought of nor understood as part of these daily rituals of deciphering the red and green light indicators.

The second group of technologies consists of those which are fully invisible or hidden from the surface level of the material basis for everyday activity. It seems fair to say that the urban everyday life relies increasingly on these types of 'hidden' technologies, which nonetheless govern the daily range of possibilities for the individual urban dweller. Their use is defined by *familiarity*, which overall is an important dimension of everyday aesthetic experiences (Saito, 2017). Water infrastructure is an example of a large-scale technological system which is in most contemporary cities hidden from the plain sight. Clean water provided by a very complex system of pipes, pumps and purification is nonetheless considered to be a basal level necessity for contemporary urban life. It seems fair to say, that technologies are more and more intentionally designed to become invisible. This development is explained for example as a safety measure, since changing conditions are a risk for the functioning of some of these types of technologies. Weather conditions and vandalism, for example in the case of electrical wiring, might lead to digging electricity lines underground or retrofitting them into the built structures instead of hanging wires outside the walls of building. It seems, however, very likely that safety and maintenance reasons for hiding technologies are also accompanied by assessing them as aesthetically unpleasing. The electrical wirings, for example, are one example of this although in some cities the aesthetic appreciation of these external wirings comes precisely from their extravagant appearance.

At first glance, the third group is the most difficult to define as it concerns mostly new technologies and also those, which are still being implemented into the urban sphere. However, it is reasonable to think that a distinct group of its own consists of networked technologies, which combine perceptual and non-perceptual forms. Most new and emerging technologies can be categorized through their perceptual presence in the cityscape as well as through the quality of their aesthetic effects. 5G network is a relatively recent example of a complex technology which is invisible to its end users but which, however, relies on highly visible technological parts which need to be implemented into the existing urban structure. This type of technological mediation of human-world relations which is hidden from perception has interesting implications to urban aesthetics. One obvious implication to social justice that these types of technologies have is the question of their accessibility. However, from the perspective of urban aesthetics, also the omnipresent reliance of urban technologies seems to be narrowing the scope of individual choice.

The infrastructure of a contemporary city does not consist anymore only of roads or a functioning sewer network. Even though many of the networks are invisible, the structures that enable them have often highly visible consequences in the cityscape. As an example, cell phone networks require antennae towers that have been disguised as palm trees and flagpoles, or converged with new types of lampposts that have replaced the older, simpler models. Another example of new, highly visible structures in the city are stations for charging electric vehicles and solar panels for localized needs for electricity. These take up space and affect by necessity also the most obvious aesthetic qualities and affordances of the places in which they are installed.

### 3. The Small Banalities of Technological Mediation

Whether the use and increase in the reliance of increasingly hidden technologies is compromising the autonomy and values of the urban dweller is an interesting question. In this paper, the topic is approached through paying attention to and analysing some cases of awkward and banal encounters with hidden urban everyday technologies. On many instances, these moments of awkwardness can create uncomfortable and even banal gaps in the scope of the urban everyday aesthetic experiences. These small moments of conflict are not, however, usually the ones which are taken into consideration when thinking about the use or the overall appearance of a city to its dwellers.

Since Martin Heidegger elaborated on the use and meaning of tools, their fundamental unreliability has been considered to be a somewhat defining part of human-technology relations (see e.g. Heidegger, 1978; Verbeek, 2005; Verbeek, 2016). As we all probably know from our own experience, temporal as well as functional inconsistencies such as lagging, freezing, and glitches are part and parcel of the use of different technologies. Whether rudimentary forms or more advanced technologies, their ideal and planned use is replaced in practice by a realization that one is always to some degree on the mercy of more or less unexpected malfunctions. These discrepancies in the use of technology are to some extent considered in their design phases, although the design activity tends to focus on idealized visions of smooth user experience. In any case, experientially one has to become somewhat habituated to ruptures with a range from the merely inconvenient to substantially banal and disrupting. These experiences have come to play an important part in the everyday going-about-minding-ones-business, since without some level of mental preparedness, meaningful activity would be seriously affected by these momentary breaks. The level of uncertainty, however, can surely be considered to cause extra stress to the experiencer-turned-user.

Everyday urban mobility is an interesting case from the perspective of everyday banal experiential ruptures. Aesthetically, it is not unimportant what type or selection of modes of transportation one chooses or is even able to choose in the first place. (Mladenovic, Lehtinen and Martens, 2019) An underground public transportation mode such as the metro offers radically different affordances to exploring the city on foot or through the windshield of a private vehicle that one is driving. Thinking towards the future of urban environments, even the possibility of autonomous driving is again challenging the preconceived notions of what it means to move in the city and how smooth this experience can be. Whether you understand the experience of moving in a city through kinaesthetic (Lobo, 2020) or somaesthetic (Shusterman, 2019) framework, the perception of a city is strongly affected by the embodied nature of movement besides the cognitive factors such as knowledge, imagination, and even memories.

Another topic to consider from this perspective is linked to the questions of privacy, that has become increasingly central in contemporary cities globally. The many new, networked technologies which are implemented into the urban

environment provide a way to approach the everyday banal moments of experiential rupture. Especially after the terrorist attacks of the early 2000's, there has been a steep increase in the development and implementation of sophisticated surveillance technologies that detect and analyse not only the movement patterns but also the recognizable features of people who are present in the public space (see e.g. Lyon, 2003). These technologies include clear signs of surveillance, for example CCTV and biometric technologies such as facial feature and movement pattern detection and recognition. However, also many of those technologies, which have another purpose as their main reason is implementation, can be used for surveillance purposes if the data they produce is used in this way. In the scope of this article, it is not possible to delve deeper into the topic of the aesthetic consequences of surveillance technologies, but they most certainly have an effect on how the city is experienced and what is expected of the interactions taking place in the urban sphere. As contemporary cities globally are marked by an increasing reliance on intricate, interlinked technologies, the need to understand the aesthetic implications of surveillance technologies is also to be taken into consideration.

#### 4. The Aesthetic Potential of New Urban Technologies

It is still common that technology is treated as a negative or even potentially dangerous force that alienates people from some type of a more authentic way of being (Verbeek, 2005). This type of thinking has been present persistently in the Western philosophical tradition as well as in common everyday life. According to the alienation views, especially after Heidegger, the way in which technologies situate themselves between the human and the world to mediate this relation, poses a risk of distancing from the worldly phenomena altogether. This can be described as a fear of losing connection in experience as well as on the level of knowledge. As the world – or the city in our particular case – becomes experienced through a filter of technology, we perceive it less directly. Neither are we able to know precisely what is happening in each different process of technological mediation.

The current forms of urban life provide an interesting case in this sense, as the human ability to conduct intentional activity and collaboration is at the very core of the existence of shared urban life. Without organized activity, various forms of collaboration, and goal-oriented planning, it would not be possible to design, let alone lead a life in urban environments. In this sense, technology should be understood as something radically distinct from the rest of the structures and processes of the city. As a thoroughly human-made context, cities are entirely dependent on complex technologies from the beginning of their creation, whether temporarily distant or taking place currently. The city itself is a multifaceted processual and technological construct.

Echoing some of the core ideas of pragmatist philosophy, the postphenomenological approaches in the philosophy of technology emphasize that it is a more reasonable idea to study individual technologies instead of aiming at a very generalized ponderation over the larger notion of Technology

(Verbeek, 2005; Nagenborg et al., 2020). In the same way, it is more useful to zoom into a more focused group such as urban technologies through a more defined approach, such as their aesthetic impact in the case of this paper. One potential aesthetically positive way to approach new and emerging urban technologies would be through the notion of *the urban sublime*. (Den Tandt, 2014) Even though the sublime is not definable entirely in positive terms, the overall variety and diversity in aesthetic scope is significant in the case of the sublime. The sublime in the case of the urban environments has already been linked to technology in particular, through the notion of *the technological sublime* which is described also in relation to the urban experience. (Nye, 1994) The sublime in the context of technology underlines first how the technologically mediated experiences cannot be defined entirely as positive or negative and how technology, also aesthetically, bears this element of mystery that is linked to its functioning. The technological sublime has been used to describe the experience of e.g. the industrial ruins in cities, but I find it a useful term to approach the underlying aesthetic tensions in the relation with contemporary technologies very much in use.

In the case of new technologies, it is important to remember that instead of a contemplative approach to the urban everyday, they become experienced through being used in an active engagement. This is a significant aspect of how the aesthetic scope of their use is determined. In philosophical aesthetics, disinterestedness as a sort of distanced appreciation without ulterior motives has been defining aesthetic experiences to a significant degree. Digital technologies, for example, unless they are used in artistic context, are first and foremost a tool and something that is utilized to reach a certain goal. Most often these goals are predetermined, even though new ideas might stem from their use as well. Spontaneous new uses are, however, relatively rare in the case of many new types of technologies. When they exist, they usually form significant examples of urban activism, tactical urbanism and other types of bottom-up movements which aim at strategically shaking the established socio-technological systems.

It would be important to understand firstly the extent to which the urban *lifeworld* is already highly technologized, and secondly, that most of those technologies are not explicitly visible or that using them does not equal recognizing them. The relatable suspicion towards new and emerging technologies and their use should not prevent from staying actively interested and engaged in the development of these new types of technologies. The aesthetic consequences for urban everyday life could span from building information modelling (BIM) applications used for orientation and navigation purposes (Vihanninjoki and Lehtinen, 2019) to technologies for accessibility or enabling better communication. We need a better understanding of how technologies are experienced especially in cases in which social justice is at stake. A better recognition of how new technologies are affecting the distribution of attention or aesthetic qualities of everyday environments is thus something in which philosophical and applied aesthetics can assist.



## 5. Conclusions

Wireless, portable and connected technologies are changing the urban experience at a rapid pace. As these changes are often accepted as 'inevitable' improvements, the critical assessment of their use and effects is still scarce. On the other hand, also the fierce resistance towards new technological phenomena can seriously impede discussing what their true role, potential and consequences could be. Thus, both the utterly indifferent or defensive approaches might hinder the discussion and development of more human technologies with broad experiential reach.

In this article, I have proposed that the new technologies affecting mostly the urban everyday life can be grouped in three different categories according to their aesthetic qualities. The aim has been to show how this grouping will help to gain a better understanding especially of those technologies which belong to the third category and consist mostly of invisible, networked technologies but which however have also some visible effect in the urban space. I have aimed at showing that the aesthetic approach to these technologies does not consist only of the most obvious aesthetic consequences, but needs to take a deeper look into how the use of these technologies is changing the aesthetic scope of the urban everyday.

Further on I have presented the notions of the banal and the sublime, which in this context can be helpful in bringing these effects into discussions about the present state and the future prospects of cities globally. These technologies are becoming increasingly complex and require further embedded technologies on the structural level of the city. A better understanding of the complex technologies is important, not only for any average citizen (if one should base assumptions over such a figure existing), but to those professing in philosophical and applied aesthetics.

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# Urban Technologies – The New Everydayness: A Reply to Lehtinen

Sandra Zákutná

This short paper is a reply to Sanna Lehtinen's article *Living with Urban Everyday Technologies* whose aim is to introduce the complexity of the problem of everyday technologies in contemporary aesthetics. Thanks to most recent information, computing, and communication technologies, urban technologies have indeed become an indispensable part of human living standards. In connection with Lehtinen's primary interest in visible technologies with invisible effects, my reply appeals to W. Welsch's use of the term anaesthetics, which refers to the absence of the ability to feel, as a parallel to this group of technologies. The reply also emphasises that it is necessary to study urban technologies together with a focus on human privacy, social justice, and human wellbeing and that everyday aesthetics has to be ready to reflect on the extremely fast development of these technologies. |  
Keywords: *Urban Technologies, Everyday Aesthetics, Everydayness*

Sanna Lehtinen's paper *Living with Urban Everyday Technologies* (2020a) brings to the fore a very current topic. Technologies have always been connected with urban life. However, thanks to most recent information, computing, and communication technologies they have become an indispensable part of a living standard, and living with them has become our natural environment, our new 'everydayness'. I am very pleased that I was offered a chance to comment on the paper by the organizers, as Sanna Lehtinen's continuous work in the field of urban aesthetics and technology (as a relatively new field of everyday aesthetics) is well-known and these topics need to be discussed (Lehtinen, 2020a; Lehtinen, 2020b; Lehtinen, 2020c; Lehtinen and Vihanninjoki, 2019; Vihanninjoki and Lehtinen, 2019).

As Lehtinen states at the very beginning of her paper, "[t]he urban everyday took an unexpected turn in the Spring 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing restrictions to social activity." (Lehtinen, 2020a, p. 81) The

situation of the last months has shown cities as the most dangerous places for the virus spread and people in the cities have experienced unprecedented lockdowns. The pandemic, whose second wave is now a reality for many countries, shows the importance of the overall organization of cities not only as regards their infrastructures, but also the quality of life and the way people can use such infrastructures every day or, as we see it now, in the days of crisis.

Importantly, Lehtinen focuses on the place of technologies in contemporary cities from the perspective of their everyday aesthetic qualities but she also recognizes and acknowledges their role and use. She considers the issue of everyday technologies to be often overlooked by philosophical aesthetics and states that this discipline does so “often due to unquestioned ideas of how a city should ideally look and feel.” (Lehtinen, 2020a, p. 81) This is definitely true and I consider her attempt to confront contemporary cities legitimate and useful. Lehtinen says that the “paper brings together recent developments in urban aesthetics with some of the core ideas of postphenomenological approaches to new urban technologies.” (Lehtinen, 2020a, p. 81) In my opinion, these approaches could be presented in more detail to provide a broader theoretical background to the problem. If philosophical aesthetics has a tendency not to regard everyday technologies as a topic, maybe some philosophical approaches focused on the functioning public sphere, relationships and boundaries between public and private, the individual and society, could help ‘to defend’ practical philosophy and its interest in the theme.

Although the paper offers several different suggestions, here I will only try to focus on what seem to me to be the most challenging issues to be discussed. Sanna Lehtinen thematises contemporary urban technologies into three main groups according to their aesthetic qualities 1) bearing noticeable perceptual features, e. g. traffic lights, 2) being invisible or hidden, e. g. water infrastructure, 3) showing a combination of perceptual and non-perceptual forms, visible with invisible effects, e.g. 5G networks or stations for charging electric vehicles. In this paper, she is interested mainly in the last group. I wonder if this third sphere – the technologies whose effects are hidden, the networks we cannot see and feel – could not be described by what Welsch called anaesthetics. Although Welsch is not a postphenomenologist, perhaps his definition of anaesthetics may correspond to this group of technologies. He writes that he uses “the term ‘anaesthetics’ as a counterterm to ‘aesthetics’.” ‘Anaesthetics’ refers to a condition in which the elementary condition of the aesthetic – the ability to feel is absent. While aesthetics intensifies sensation, anaesthetics thematises insensitivity – the sense of loss, interruption, or the impossibility of sensibility – at all levels: from physical numbness to spiritual blindness. In short, anaesthetics has to do with the opposite side of aesthetics.” (Welsch, 2017, p. 12) In my opinion, there are certain parallels to the third group and Welsch’s approach could serve as an inspiration to deal with this specific issue.

In the third part *The Small Banalities of Technological Mediation*, Lehtinen focuses on some problems that are connected with the hidden technologies

and their malfunctions, consequences of surveillance technologies, etc., and in this context she also briefly mentions everyday urban mobility. I think this may open a debate on some social issues that should be discussed further in the urban sphere, e. g., the loss of privacy. Lehtinen aptly illustrates the “aesthetic backlash” against facial recognition in the form of anti-surveillance clothing that is, in my opinion, only supporting the idea of how necessary it is to study the urban phenomena.

The part called “The Aesthetic Potential of New Urban Technologies” emphasizes the role of individuals and active engagement in the development of urban environments – when the city “itself is a multifaceted processual and technological construct.” (Lehtinen, 2020a, p. 86) Referring to Den Tandt (2014), Lehtinen tries to approach emerging technologies through the notion of *the urban sublime* and further referring to the notion of *the technological sublime*. I would appreciate if these two terms were described more in-depth, for example by using some examples, so as to help readers understand them. An interesting question in this regard is whether these two terms cooperate with the active engagement the author refers to in the next part of the paper.

In the conclusion, the author says that she has “aimed at showing that the aesthetic approach to these technologies does not consist only of the most obvious aesthetic consequences, but needs to take a deeper look into how the use of these technologies is changing the aesthetic scope of the urban everyday.” (Lehtinen, 2020a, p. 88) The question that comes to my mind here is how these technologies, that are hidden, relate to everyday aesthetics, i.e., with the everydayness or our actual experience. Although we do not see such technologies, we have some information about their existence, function and use. But does this fact, this knowledge, influence our view or attitude towards the city? If we know and think about technologies, does it change the way we *look* at the city or rather the way we *think* about it? If we speak of “deep-seated role of technologies” in the cities (from infrastructure to navigation or virtual reality apps) when cities today are fully dependent on technologies, does it change the aesthetic optics of perceiving the city?

Of course, we cannot avoid the technological development and the use of technologies in the cities. I agree with Lehtinen that a better understanding of technologies is important both for a philosophical as well as for an applied aesthetics. It is not an issue that could be studied separately; aesthetics has to address the issue together with ethics and sociology as well as social and political philosophy, if it aims to better understand the phenomena of cities. I think therefore that studying technologies in connection with questions of human privacy, social justice or human wellbeing, as Sanna Lehtinen does, is very important. I appreciate that her paper presents a way to introduce a complex problem that has to be further discussed on several levels to be ready to reflect the extremely fast development of everyday urban technologies.

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# What Makes Things Banal

Lukáš Makky

In this paper, I investigate the origins of banality and the reasons why some phenomena appear banal to us. I discuss the issue by analysing three interrelated areas of aesthetic investigation: artworks, everyday objects, and banal things. By identifying the source of banality, my goal is to understand what makes banal things different from other kinds of things. I consider the following questions: 1) when, why, and how does an object become banal?; 2) what happens when something becomes banal?; 3) are banal things aesthetically appealing? Drawing on Wolfgang Iser's notion of aesthetic distance and Walter Benjamin's account of aura, I argue that banality consists in the absence of both an ontological and an axiological character in objects, which makes them appear trivial or insignificant to us. I conclude by showing that although art, everydayness, and banality represent different aesthetic dimensions, objects constantly move from one of these dimensions to the other. | Keywords: *Banalities, Art, Everyday Aesthetics, Aura, Anesthetization*

## 1. Introduction

Small and insignificant things, phenomena, and moments 'co-create' our daily life and the world as we know it. They are an immanent part of our experience and despite this, we mostly don't care about them. We deem such things as *banal* as if they make up only minor, imperceptible details of the environment where the important things or the things that deserve our attention are set. This may cast doubts on the meaningfulness of my examination at its very beginning: why, indeed, should one need to investigate banal things and search for their origins if these things are actually *banal*?<sup>1</sup>

Jan Mukařovský (1966) answers this question clearly enough when he claims that any object, activity, or fact can be the carrier of an aesthetic function, and therefore can be aesthetically interesting and significant. Looking at banal

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<sup>1</sup> This may resemble the question that kickstarted the field of everyday aesthetics, when the main concern was to find methodological arguments able to justify the need for an analysis of everydayness. See for example: Light and Smith (2005); Kupfer (1983); Saito (2008, 2017); Yuedi and Carter (2014).

things from Mukařovský's perspective is refreshing and can redeem banal things from their usual status<sup>2</sup>. Mukařovský's thesis, however, can also be understood slightly differently, as if he was saying that everything that surrounds us can be a potential object of aesthetic inquiry, *even though* it doesn't need to be significant in itself. This, I think, is the way we should look at banality: as composed of marginal things whose character, substance, impact, and scope can be fundamental for us, but whose existence we commonly neglect.

This gives us a compelling reason to explore the nature of banal things and to search for what makes such things banal in the first place. We can assume that banal things are not intentionally created to be banal: they *become* banal.<sup>3</sup> Something internal or external is the cause of their banalization. In this paper, I will search for the roots of banality through reference to three related areas of aesthetic investigation. I will focus on a) art, b) everyday objects, and c) banal things, activities, and phenomena. Everyday objects and banal things will not be regarded as derivative or secondary forms of art but rather as subjects of aesthetic investigation in themselves, although I recognize that there is a connection between art and these other aesthetic objects.<sup>4</sup>

An important question in this regard will be whether some quality makes banal things different from other things so that we can identify the source of their banality somewhere in their nature. To address this question, I will consider the following interrelated issues: 1) when, why, and how does something become banal? 2) what happens when something becomes banal? 3) can banal objects be aesthetically appealing?

This will lead me to quest for the basic reasons that lead us to consider banal things as insignificant and replaceable.

## 2. Anesthetics, Aura and Art

Banal things differ from other objects in something exceptionally trivial; that is why we do not intentionally pay attention to them. This aspect can be a determining factor in order to better understand our relationship with banality. An important point is that banal things represent a set of objects that we, as recipients, are not even able to perceive, because we tend to be indifferent or perceptively immune towards them. In other words, we cannot even see them.

This idea has been notably examined by Wolfgang Iser (1990) in his *Aesthetics and anesthetics*. Iser addresses the issue by considering what he calls the phenomenon of "saturation of aesthetic facts" that takes place in the

<sup>2</sup> According to Migařov (2016, p. 34) "one crucial aspect of banality is a sense of mundaneness, triviality, insignificance, irrelevance, paltriness."

<sup>3</sup> For a philosophical and aesthetic account on the issue of intentions, see Livingston (2007, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Pragmatist approaches explain thoroughly the relation of art to life, and in some cases extend the analysis to the role of everyday life in the arts (Dewey, 1980; Shusterman, 2000).



postmodern era of hyper-aestheticization. This phenomenon gives rise to a process of estrangement leading the recipient to 'move' the perceived object to a sort of 'grey zone' where the object is alienated from the domain of aesthetics and even from the domain of perception in general. The recipient, however, doesn't have any other choice, because too many impulses are attacking her senses from everywhere and making a selection between these impulses would request too much energy. That is the reason why she just simply stops 'feeling' or starts to be blind as regards aesthetic stimuli.

According to Welsch, anesthetization can depend on two related factors. In the first place, the fact that (a) we get used to a condition in which certain objects do not cause any mental or perceptual motion in us so that we do not even expect that these objects can arise something anymore. This estrangement is partly caused by the number of images surrounding us and the fact that such images are not real but rather mediate reality by distorting or even alienating it (Welsch, 1990).

In the second place, the fact that (b) the reality we perceive has nothing special or particularly significant to offer, and although it may engender some aesthetic interest in us, this interest can only be superficial and transient.

One could blame modernism for this because estrangement can be regarded as an effect of modernity and anaesthetization as an experience the modern recipient goes through (Jameson, 1991, p. 124). But in this case as in many others, modernism would be subject to an unjustified accusation. Banality is indeed not merely a consequence of modernity, but something that has to do with how things are in themselves.

Therefore, although Welsch's account of anaesthetization offers us some important conceptual tools to understand the phenomenon, his explanation seems to me not sufficient to account for how banal things are created. We need to look somewhere else if we want to find an answer to this question. My suggestion is that we turn to the idea that banal objects can be the result of anesthetization because there is something in their essence, some fundamental quality or attribute, that these objects lack, and that makes them banal in the first place and justify why we overlook them. If this is the case, then one way to understand what this lacking quality may be, I contend, is to call into question the notion of aura and its relationship to aesthetic value.

## 2.1 Art

Nothing seems more distant to banality than art itself: banality looks like an antonym of art both at the semantic and at the aesthetic level. This, however, can only be true to the extent that we don't accept banal things as an inspiration or material for art, at least when art is understood according to the mimetic paradigm<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Jana Migašová (2016) surveys the possibility of the presence of banality in art.

Here it may be good to introduce a differentiation that will be further discussed later on in this paper, namely, that between banal objects and everyday objects. One example may be useful to grasp the relevance of this difference. Typically, artists choose to depict things that, in their eyes, are extraordinary. Such things, however, do not need to be extraordinary in themselves or for everybody else.

This gives me a chance to respond to an observation made by Tufan Acil, who commented on a previous version of this paper during the colloquium *Banality, Aesthetics and Everyday Life* (Presov, October 8th, 2020). In his commentary, Acil refers to Heidegger's famous example of 'Van Gogh's shoes'. This example, I think, shows us that even something seemingly unimportant, like a pair of shoes, can be inspiring for an artist, and remain banal for everybody else. The shoes depicted by Van Gogh are just tools and even worn-out tools, but they are transformed when they are represented on the canvas. However, I don't think these shoes become less banal just because they are now the object of a work of art. Although they may become aesthetically intriguing as a result of this artistic transposition, they still retain their essential banality. In light of this example, we can assume that even though the relationship between art and banality cannot be characterized in terms of a mere opposition, there is no doubt that art works on a completely different level than everyday life. Whatever art is in its nature, it cannot be just a matter of habits, of things that we can encounter anywhere and anytime, but must be something that significantly differs from other things.

Of course, thinking that there must be an intrinsic or essential difference between art and other things seems to lead us back to an elitist artistic approach (Dubuffet, 1988; Shusterman, 2000) such as that pursued by classical aesthetics. Today, it is clear that the borders between different domains, especially between the domain of aesthetics and that of art, need to be reconsidered, for they are much more elusive (see Jameson, 1991) than we thought. But we do not need to accept any essentialist definition of art to claim that there must be something that distinguishes art from banal things.<sup>6</sup>

One way to clarify the issue is to refer to Walter Benjamin's famous discussion on the notion of aura in his *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1969). According to Benjamin, the existence of art is dependent on two categories: (1) space and (2) time, which guarantee the originality of an artwork (Benjamin, 1969, p. 3), represent the proof of its authenticity (see Dadejik, 2009; Šábik, 2009), and differentiate the original from its counterfeit or reproduction.

The notion of aura doesn't represent a defining criterion for Benjamin, and he does not use it to define art. Rather, he believes that since it represents the here and now of a work, the aura guarantees the unique being of an artwork at

<sup>6</sup> There are many approaches concerning the question of how to define art and many types of definitions have been proposed, of an anti-essentialist, analytical, functional and procedural, intentional, historical, institutional, and cluster type. See especially Beardsley (1983); Danto (1964); Dickie (1974); Gaut (2000); Goodman (1977); Levinson (1979) and Weitz (1956). For an insightful historical analysis of the issue see Davies (1991).

the place of its existence (Benjamin, 1969). “The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (Benjamin, 1969, p. 3). Indeed, the authenticity of a certain thing cannot be repeated or copied. Aura, which is interpreted by Benjamin as “a peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be” (Benjamin, 1972, p. 20), is the proof of this unrepeatable authenticity and the unviolated authority of the artwork.

Aura allows for an overcoming of space and time and arouses in the recipients the feeling that art in itself is something strange, demanding and challenging. This can add some distance in the interaction between the recipient and the artwork, and since interacting with art is not always simple, one can wonder whether Benjamin’s recourse to aura complicates an already complicated situation rather than clarifying it. In Benjamin’s text, aura sometimes seems to work more mystically than aesthetically and this makes the process of aesthetic perception and understanding of art to become even less clear and approachable from the point of view of recipients.

But for Benjamin aura is primarily inner energy, a power that preserves an artwork’s uniqueness and irreplaceability and assures its specific place in history and culture. It is an evidence of originality and novelty and corresponds to the value the artwork acquires because of the time and space of its origin. The primacy of an artwork also justifies its position in art history.

To the same extent, when we appreciate theater plays, paintings, or films we judge them based on their inventiveness and novelty. As recipients, we are willing to admit that new artworks can be technically good<sup>7</sup> but when they copy older artworks, we generally dismiss them as derivative, unoriginal, and so on. Thus, despite all the transformations happening in the modern or post-modern world and despite “the end of the concept of the masterpiece” (Jameson, 1991), the uniqueness of an artwork still has a fundamental role for us.

In Benjamin’s understanding, the evidence of this uniqueness is aura itself, an element which specifies or rather identifies the origin of an artifact by tracing it back to a moment of the past, while at the same time reflecting its ‘existence’. Aura is thus a guarantee of value, but this value cannot be defined, so it is not possible to compare the *aura* of two different artifacts. Aura is indeed an absolute, but it can be more or less present, even if it can be more or less present in a certain object.

An important thing is that authenticity, as a quality generated by the aura, is non-reproducible. This is what Benjamin (1969, p. 3) intends when stating that: “The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical – and, of course not only technical – reproducibility”. This does not only mean that authenticity cannot be reproduced, but also that the artwork loses its uniqueness when reproduced, that is, it loses its essence or value which are aspects of aura.

<sup>7</sup> This could bring us to reconsider the distinction between art and craft, not just in a terminological but also in an axiological and ontological sense (see for example Giombini, 2017; Kopčáková, 2020).

Authenticity cannot be the content of technical reproduction: the process of reproduction gives rise to something ontologically new but it cannot recreate aura. In this sense, with the process of reproduction, the artwork itself fades away as it loses its main constituent, namely, its originality or its aura. Benjamin's core criticism of mechanical reproduction is based exactly on this impossibility to transfer 'the substance' of an artwork through reproduction. Technical reproduction causes the aura to vanish or be dissolved in fragments, transferring the object to a dimension without aura. Importantly, this also creates the conditions for banal things to be produced in the first place as changeable and undistinguished objects deprived of any specific identity.

### 3. The Other (True) Aura

Walter Benjamin admits that even things other than art objects possess an aura. He claims indeed that

The concept of aura which was proposed above with reference to historical objects may usefully be illustrated with reference to the aura of natural ones. [...] If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch. (Benjamin, 1969, p. 5)

In this quotation, the notion of aura is expanded here in two different ways.

On the one hand, Benjamin seems to claim that when he talks about aura, he is not uniquely referring to the aura of *artworks*, but rather to the aura of *historical objects* in general, namely any kind of objects or tools created in the past, including objects that are part of some tradition.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, all 'images' or artifacts of the past seem to bear the traits of aura. Aura is just like the patina that reveals the age of old paintings and exemplifies their belonging to the past. This aura, the aura of human-made objects, has primarily an ontological character and determines the place of the artifact in history.

On the other hand, Benjamin also assumes that aura – that which relates the object to a certain place and time – can be also perceived, seen, and 'breathed' in natural objects. In this case, the aura does not simply reflect the temporal horizon of the object but rather the temporal and spatial horizon of *perception* itself. What we perceive within these natural auratic objects is the remnant of an aura that corresponds to an original, indescribable experience, one that can be mediated through cult and ceremony. Our inability to fully comprehend the aura's presence and persistence gives the natural bearers of aura a time-resistant value.

Extending the concept of aura in this way leads one to the disturbing conclusion that every object can have its aura; a conclusion, however, that would imply a misreading of Benjamin's thought if further clarification is not added. As a matter of fact, it is not that every object has an aura, but that 'every

<sup>8</sup> An interesting inquiry in the issue of the images of the past (or past images) is offered by Didi-Huberman (2005) and Aldhouse-Green (2004). A more classical and traditional approach, on the other hand, can be found in Gadamer (2004) and Ingarden (1946).

human-made object' can, including objects that are invented, modified, or altered by human beings. Such objects, which dispose of 'fragments' of aura, can indeed become part of some cultural tradition, enter the sphere of the cult, and acquire in this way some auratic value.

This participation of objects in a cult or activities related to a cult is what Ellen Dissanayake (1995, 2009) calls specialization (see Davies, 2005). According to Dissanayake, specialization, as a process, is a common phenomenon in human praxis, and one that can give rise to an artistic praxis. Through the process of specialization, common objects with an identifiable ontology are distinguished from cult objects whose aura is endowed with a value that is perceivable throughout space and time. This 'aesthetic side' of the aura is neither an immanent nor an arbitrary part of aura but the result of a continuous change, which depends on the processes, practices, and ceremonies in which the objects find their role. These processes, practices, and ceremonies create a tradition that is responsible for the transfer of the sacred and ceremonial character of cult objects to art objects. Aura represents indeed a way by which the relationship that links an object to a cult or tradition is made visible, just like the object's bond with the past.

We can summarize our former considerations by saying that aura, according to Benjamin, works on two levels: (1) as an ontological guarantee proving that the auratic object has been created somewhere and at some time or connecting the object to a cult via an act of specialization; and (2) as an axiological guarantee of value. If this second aspect depends on the former, so that the value of an auratic object resides on its ontology, is hard to say. But certainly, the aura is responsible for the identity of an object and proves its inalterability and specificity with regard to other objects.

Benjamin's critique of mechanical reproduction (1969) as the process by which an original is transformed into a copy and is thus falsified, is based on this assumption. Mechanical reproduction can only give rise to 'clones' or replicas that, although being visually identical to the original, are empty, replaceable, and deprived of value. This repetition in terms of reproduction involves a weakening of the power of aura or even its destruction.

Significantly, understanding this process is also key to explain how banal objects are created.

#### **4. The Absence of Axiological and Ontological Value**

The process of banalization itself can be seen as the gradual disappearance of aura from an object, in both its aesthetic and axiological character, which also entails a loss in the aesthetic function of the object.

Welsch's thesis seems to play an important role here because it can account for our non-sensitivity and perhaps even blindness as regards banal objects. However, while Welsch's theory of the anesthetic only interprets banalization as an experiential process resulting from the individual's reception of and interaction with an object, Benjamin's conception of the aura also adds an

important ontological element to Welsch's picture, because it implies that banal objects are characterized by the *absence* of something.

From this point of view, all banal things can be seen as originally possessing an aura that disappeared or was weakened at some point in time. But when, and why? The answer is hidden in the term 'aura' itself. As I have argued, aura is proof of the ontological and axiological uniqueness of an object, which originates in a certain tradition and cult practice. Banal things, on the other hand, have no uniqueness and show instead a character of anonymity, replaceability, triviality, and monotony which is conveyed by mechanic reproduction. Repetition indeed destroys uniqueness and originality and creates things without an identity – homogenous, deformed, and adjustable.

Thus, while aura is created by some special and temporal constants (here and now), banal things are created through the repetition of these constants. Repetition of place can occur quite often: firstly intentionally, and then stereotypically when it becomes subconscious. In this sense, visiting the church and going to work become banal activities when repeated even though one is aware of these actions when doing them. They are banal because they are not specific, unique, or different. If someone always visits the same castle ruins, sits on the same chair under the same tree, and reads, this action becomes merely a habit and all its uniqueness fades away. To the same extent, a flower bouquet on Valentine's Day, chocolates for birthdays, flowers on graves for anniversaries: if these are regular gestures that are repeated every year at the same time, they could turn into banal things. When an action is repeated, time is no more a purveyor of particularity, and the action becomes merely 'one in a row'.

But what makes banal things different from activities, phenomena, and objects that belong to the sphere of everyday life? Let's imagine a black hairgrip. There is probably nothing more trivial, banal, and over-familiar than a hairgrip. It is a small piece of metal which is sold in packages of ten or even more pieces. When we lose a hairgrip, it doesn't matter because we have plenty of them (although we are often unable to find any of them when we need them!). Each hairgrip is very much the same as every other.

However, when a hairgrip features a particular color, material, or even some decoration or shape, then it is distinguished and made unique and special with regard to the group of all the other average hairgrips. According to Mukařovský (1966), in this case the aesthetic function of the hairgrip takes dominance and makes it different from seemingly identical objects. We could say that it strengthens its 'aura'. This also happens when a hairgrip, for example, is used by thieves or private detectives to open locks, handcuffs, etc., as it often happens in movies. These and other similar uses, although not necessarily aesthetic, make an object unique by endowing it with some significance.

As we have seen, the ontological character of the aura is what relates an object to a specific and unique space and time, while its axiological valence is acquired through a process of specialization. Reproduction weakens both the axiological and the ontological aspects of aura. When everyday objects are

mechanically multiplied up to the level that the newly created product becomes interchangeable with all others, they lose their identity as singular objects and become banal, thus invisible to the recipient.

In this sense, while aura in artworks entails the perception of both the special value and the uniqueness of the auratic work *qua* individual object – namely, the axiological and ontological component of aura – everyday objects have lost such value. In turn, banal objects are everyday objects that are deprived not only of their value but also of their ontological individuality as singular, recognizable objects. Banal things, in other words, lack both the axiological and the ontological dimension of aura. As a result, they appear the closest and most approachable as possible to the recipient, so that the recipient does not even need to think about them when she uses them. Consequently, as these things lose their place in the recipient's experience, they are, so to speak, condemned to die.

## 5. Conclusion

I have argued that there is both an axiological and an ontological difference between art, everyday objects, and banal things, but it is also true that throughout their existence objects constantly move from one field of the aesthetic sphere to another.

In this regard, when answering the question of *what* makes things banal, we do not have to search for an element or feature that all banal things *possess*. Rather, we shall search for what all banal things *lack*. It is the lack of some quality and in particular, the lack of aura, that distinguishes these objects from other objects. Banal objects lack ontological structure, aesthetic function, and even sometimes practical function, at least according to an etymological understanding of the verb 'to practice'.

When it comes to understanding 'how' banal things are produced, I have argued that repetition is what we should look at. But repetition only produces banality when the ontological integrity and identity of an object is destroyed. If we cannot see any difference between two seemingly identical, yet intrinsically different objects, then such objects start to appear trivial, and if they are unnoticed for too long, they become banal.

In this sense, banal things are not valueless by nature, but their ontological status is so fragile that they are constantly at risk of disappearing, as if they were not even present anymore. This sole fact, I think, gives us reason to investigate banality aesthetically.

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# The Significance of Banal Things: A Reply to Makky

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This short paper comments on Lukáš Makky's article *What Makes Things Banal*. The argument is divided into two sections. The first section reconstructs Makky's understanding of banality, which he develops based on aesthetic theories by Wolfgang Iser and Walter Benjamin. The second and more critical section examines the validity of the arguments Makky uses for his definition of banality. Although this commentary attaches great value to Makky's insightful analysis of the term banality and agrees with identifying it as a historical and processual concept, drawing on writings by M. Heidegger and J. Derrida it eventually proposes a different understanding of the relationship between the arts and banal things and underlines the importance of banality for the creation and perception of the arts. | Keywords: *Banalities, Authenticity, Aura, Perception, Repetition*

Lukáš Makky's paper *What Makes Things Banal* (2020) tackles the question of why some things, activities, and phenomena in daily life and also in the arts are banal or are meant to be banal. The author mainly argues that banal things remain the most insignificant aspects of reality that we rarely reciprocate. The text begins with the justification of the necessity and importance of scientific research on banality despite the fact that banal phenomena and activities (supposedly) constitute only 'minor details' in our daily life. For Makky, the research on banality should methodically focus on the underlying reasons and conditions of banal things and activities in daily life and aesthetics. These are indeed not intended to be created as 'banal' from the outset, but rather gradually become banal or are banalized under different social, cultural, or political circumstances. The main purpose of the paper is therefore to demonstrate how banal things get different from other things and facts in daily life and aesthetics.

Makky argues that the banality of things should originate either in relation to our perception, that is, in our aesthetic (im)perception, or in the fact that these things themselves lack something. He explains the first part of this two-sided hypothesis by referring to the notion of anaesthesia, which was systematically

developed by Wolfgang Iser (*Ästhetisches Denken*, 1990). In the light of Iser's well-known concept of anaesthetization and its dialectic relationship with the aestheticization process of modernity, Makky makes it plausible that banal things or phenomena should be directly connected with anaesthetic phenomena. According to Iser, the infinite number of aesthetic inputs that recipients have been used to experience in the last century are pushed out on the periphery of aesthetic interest, so they become imperceptible and do not cause any mental or perceptual motions in us anymore. Consequently, Makky concludes that this process characterizes the nature of banal objects and activities. They also lack perceptibility and are merely ignored by the recipient.

Makky develops the second part of his hypothesis with regard to the concept of 'aura' which was introduced by Walter Benjamin as the essence of fine art. The concept of the aura is interpreted as "inner energy, a power that preserves an artwork's uniqueness and irreplaceability and assures its specific place in history and culture". (Makky, 2020, p. 98) As in the case of anaesthetic phenomena, the author uses once again this notion *ex negativo* in order to define banality: Aura is for Makky in an axiological sense the exact opposite of banality because banal things lack the unique space and time that would guarantee their authenticity. In opposition to the notion of aura, the process of banalization or that of creating banal actions originates in the reproducibility and repetition in time and space.

It is important to note that Makky's two-sided hypothesis, which has been briefly introduced so far, does not aim to offer two different theories of banality, but one in which these two sides are internally related and complementary to each other. The author starts consistently with Iser's concept of anaesthetization of daily life in order to demonstrate that banal objects are aesthetically inaccessible to us and they are not seen or perceived. In the subsequent step, he shows that the reason why banal objects are overlooked by the recipient is directly linked to their negative property, which is imperceptibility. Since banal things lack authenticity and uniqueness in time and space, they do not offer anything special to our perception; therefore, they are not perceived and are merely ignored.

Concerning the arguments presented above, one should first of all examine if the author really answers his own question *What Makes Things Banal*, which appears in the title of the paper. The hypothesis on banality that Makky tries to construct by referring to Iser's and Benjamin's aesthetics does not directly demonstrate what banality is, but mainly what it lacks. Banal objects lack the quality of being perceptible, lack authenticity, uniqueness, and so on. It is certain that Makky's ontological approach makes a solid distinction between banal objects and other objects of daily life. However, the essential question on what banality *has* at its disposal still requires further research. At the end of the paper, Makky attempts to define banality also in terms of the property of being repeatable and reproducible. But here one should admit that not all reproducible objects, let us think for example 'books', are banal objects per se only because they are materially reproduced.

Secondly, the negative characterization of banality, as opposed to aesthetic perception and works of art, should be examined in a more detailed way. If we define banality with respect to the concept of reproducibility and repetition, then we should further clarify how it contradicts with art and with individual works of art. Isn't it the case that the arts permanently repeat or make recurrent use of the same or similar artistic forms from the art tradition? As Jacques Derrida would critically remark on this point (Derrida, 1978), it is impossible to imagine a work of art that has no reference to any other forms, styles, or subjects in the art tradition. Works of art need necessarily to be variously connected with (pre)existing works of arts and especially with artistic genres, otherwise one would never recognize them as works of art in the first place (Derrida, 1980). If we consider different aesthetic or artistic movements in the art tradition, we can easily realize that an endless number of individual and authentic works of art continuously repeat and recreate pre-existing forms. For example, impressionism can only be acknowledged as an art movement insofar as the works of different artists repeat similar forms such as the depiction of emotions and representation of 'the moment'. Thus, it is clear that the arts depend on repetitive forms, continuous recreation of the old forms and styles through new instruments and media. If we agree with the author that repetition and reproduction contribute to the process of banalization in a general sense, then repetitive motifs and forms in the art should also be considered banal. Therefore, one could finally ask: Is it possible to omit banality entirely from the arts? Can art gain the special status of being completely independent of banality?

Thirdly, it is necessary to consider that the relationship between the arts and banality is different from mere opposition. Given the fact that we are continuously surrounded by banal activities and objects, as the author well explicates, we should ask what arts can teach us about the banal reality of our times, so that this reality might gradually become less banal and banal objects might also acquire some meaning for us. Makky refers at the beginning of his text to an author, Martin Heidegger, whose aesthetic theory could offer a different understanding of the relationship between banal objects and works of art. In his famous essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1960), Heidegger discusses how art provides a basic understanding of ourselves and our relationship with the world that we cannot obtain in any other way. His well-known analysis of *A Pair of Peasant Shoes* by Van Gogh results in an understanding of the real essence and the truth of these pair of shoes (or banal things) as 'reliability' (Ger. *Verlässlichkeit*) in daily life. In other words, art reveals the underlying functions and truth of banal things and objects. Without art, and living only within the realm of banal objects, we would continue to ignore the underlying meaning of such objects' existence and could never gain true knowledge about their essence and real function. In a continuous relation with banal objects and acts, art does not only manifest their intern reality but also gradually takes out or eliminate their banality for the recipient. Finally, its effect goes beyond the sphere of aesthetics and helps the recipient perceive these objects less banal also in their daily life.

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