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A Swallow Does Not Make a Summer

Towards a Theory of the Human Aesthetic as a Habitual Disposition

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Abstract. This paper is part of a broader effort to reinterpret the human aesthetic through the lens of the notion of habitus or disposition, considering the recent resurgence of interest, within the field of contemporary aesthetics, in Aristotelian virtues ("aesthetic virtue") and, within the field of analytic metaphysics, in the concept of power. Assuming that virtues in aesthetics are excellences of the character that enable us to cor-respond appropriately to (active) aesthetic objects, this paper explores how and to what extent an (aesthetic) subject can achieve self-knowledge of having reached that "level of excellence" of their (aesthetic) disposition or power. Additionally, it suggests that experiences of failure might have a role, *ex negativo*, in this process. The text is organized into paragraphs, each addressing one of the following points: 1. what a disposition (or habitus or capacity or power) is; 2. dispositions in ethics (Aristotelian virtues); 3. why and to what extent the human aesthetic can be understood as a disposition or power, referencing some recent literature on the notion of "aesthetic virtue"; 4. the relationship between aesthetic dispositions and the experience of (aesthetic) failure.

Keywords. Power, virtue, excellence, self-knowledge, failure, latency, habitus.

What is a disposition and how can we cultivate it? What is the relationship between powers, dispositions, virtues, habits and the aesthetic domain? What are aesthetic habits? (Bertinetto [2024], this volume). This paper is part of a broader attempt to reinterpret the human aesthetic through the lens of the notion of disposition or habit(us) (Portera [2020, 2020a, 2022, 2023, 2023a, 2024]). This inquiry is prompted by a relatively recent resurgence of interest within contemporary aesthetics in Aristotelian virtues ("aesthetic virtue"; see Kieran [2010, 2012]; McIver Lopes [2008]; Goldie [2007, 2008]) and within analytic metaphysics in the concept of power (see Austin, Marmodoro, Roselli [2022]; Boccaccini, Marmodoro [2017]; Marmodoro [2012, 2010]). In particular, assuming that virtues in aesthetics are excellences of the character that enable us to cor-respond (Perullo [2024], in press) appropriately to (active) aesthetic objects, I shall explore whether and to what extent an (aesthetic) subject can achieve self-knowledge of having reached a "level of excellence" in their (aesthetic) stable disposition or power (habitus). I will also suggest that experiences of failure might play a role, *ex negativo*, in this process.

The text is organized into the following sections: 1. what a disposition (or habitus or power) is; 2. dispositions in ethics (Aristotelian virtues); 3. why and to what extent the human aesthetic can be understood as a disposition or a power, with reference to some recent literature on the notion of "aesthetic virtue"; 4. the relationship between aesthetic dispositions and the experience of (aesthetic) failure. For the sake of simplicity, the concepts of disposition, habitus, power, and dispositional property will be used synonymously throughout this paper. A distinction will be made between the notions of "habit" and "habitus" based on their different gradients of stability, with "habitus" indicating a stable and firm disposition, and "habit" indicating a temporary and relatively transient instantiation of a habitus. The two concepts however, as we will see, are strictly inter-connected.

1. *What dispositions or powers really are*

Recent years have seen a significant increase in interest in the notions of disposition or power, especially in the field of analytic metaphysics (see Austin, Marmodoro, Roselli [2022], Boccaccini, Marmodoro [2017], Marmodoro [2012, 2010]). Indeed, aside from research trends in the academic scientific community, if we look at everyday human life, dispositions truly seem to play a crucial role in our experience as human beings. Also called powers or dispositional properties, examples of dispositions include fragility, poisonousness, and generosity. We protect things that are fragile; we avoid things that are poisonous; we admire people for their generosity or, coming closer to my point in this paper, for their capacity to engage in rewarding aesthetic experiences.

As a starting point for my argument in this paper, I suggest that we make a distinction between what I call *innate* dispositions, which are *per se* properties of things (both animate and inanimate) in the world or part of their intrinsic set of features, and *acquired* dispositions, which are not innate (except for the fact of individuals being endowed with a pre-disposition to cultivate them) but rather necessitate time, repetition, and a process of habituation to develop and cultivate. My focus in this paper is on acquired dispositions; an example of acquired disposition is virtue. In the Aristotelian understanding, virtues are the (reached) excellences in dispositions, also called habitus or *hexeis* (*Nic. Eth*. 1105b 19 ss.). As we shall see, they result from a process of habituation and need practice. Consider an individual named Lisa, who has started to perform acts of generosity. While she may be naturally predisposed towards the acquisition of virtues (*Nic*. *Eth.* 1103a 19-30), turning this pre-disposition into a proper "habitus of generosity" or virtue requires something more than mere nature: time, effort, and exercise. Indeed, as Aristotle argues, «From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature […]. Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit» (*Nic*. *Eth.* 1103a 19, 24-25). Now, how can Lisa, interested in cultivating by habituation her disposition towards generosity and devoting time and effort to this aim, attain self-knowledge of having made it perfect and reached "the top" – that is, at a certain point in time along the process of habituation, of having achieved excellence in being generous, thereby attaining a *proper* virtue (*Nic*. *Eth.* 1097b 22, 1098a 20)? One of the aims of this paper is to tackle this question, which is *not* entirely Aristotelian in its spirit (see Donato [2018]). To unpack it effectively, I shall first define (in the simplest and most intuitive possible way) the notion of disposition (or power).

Dispositions, or powers, can be understood as entities in a state of readiness for action; when they interact with the environment, they become manifest. For example, a crystal glass is fragile, indicating that it has a disposition to break into pieces when struck with a stone or when it falls onto a hard floor. Currently, there is considerable debate in the scientific community regarding the nature of powers, including the ideas that (1) powers are the ultimate entities in the world (ungrounded powers), (2) everything that exists in the world is ultimately constituted of powers (pan-dispositionalism) or, conversely, that (3) powers always need to be grounded in more fundamental categorial properties to exist (see, for instance, Marmodoro [2010], Marmodoro, Mayr [2019]). However, it is not my aim here to delve into this specialistic debate. Following the insights of Marmodoro, Mayr (2019), we can identify some common features or characteristics of dispositions: latency, conditionality, stability, reciprocity. Let us begin with the first of these, latency.

Dispositions (or powers) are not always overtly displayed, meaning they are not directly perceptible and measurable. They are hidden capabilities, "things"

that individuals (or objects) possess alongside their other observable properties. This is also true for that specific disposition or power in human beings that I call "aesthetic disposition" or *hexis aesthetiké* – the fully developed inclination to engage in more or less rewarding aesthetic relations under appropriate circumstances; the readiness to act and behave aesthetically under appropriate circumstances –, which is not directly perceptible when possessed (unlike, for instance, other qualities or properties such as permanent bodily features or traits). It is akin a concealed power that only manifests itself when in action, i.e. when it generates observable effects in individual episodes of aesthetic experience.

The point is that an object (or a person) can possess a disposition without ever manifesting it. A crystal glass may be fragile without ever breaking. How does this apply to the aesthetic disposition? It would be obviously unjustified to attribute an "aesthetic disposition" to someone who has never exercised their virtue in aesthetic experiences. This is because the acquired nature (as opposed to innate; see Portera [2020]) of aesthetic dispositions implies that individual instantiations of the aesthetic power must have occurred in order for its overall acquisition process to be possible. However, the single repeated actions that facilitate the acquisition of a virtue (such as the aesthetic one), in an Aristotelian sense, are not necessarily identical to the subsequent actions resulting from that acquired virtue (I will revisit this point later). Furthermore, could someone who has ceased to exercise their acquired aesthetic disposition still be considered to possess it? If so, in what terms? Charles Darwin's late *Autobiography* offers an intriguing passage wherein he expresses regret over losing the pleasure in aesthetic experiences that he once enjoyed as a young man: «This curious and lamentable loss of the higher aesthetic tastes is all the odder, as books on history, biographies and travels (independently of any scientific facts which they may contain), and essays of all sorts of subjects interest me as much as they ever did. My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive. A man with a mind more highly organized or better constituted than mine, would not I suppose have thus suffered; and if I had to live my life again I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least one every week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied could thus have been kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature» (Darwin [1958]: 129). Bringing together emotions, habit, repetition and pleasure, this passage suggests that the aesthetic power is a disposition that requires exercise and efforts to be preserved over time; otherwise, it gets completely lost or vanishes.

Another crucial property of dispositions is conditionality, as they are often closely linked with conditionals. For instance, fragility is a dispositional prop-

erty because it relies on a counterfactual conditional: an object is fragile to the extent that it would, under otherwise normal circumstances, break if dropped from a height onto a hard floor. Similarly, a person possesses an aesthetic capacity to the extent that they would, under otherwise normal circumstances, engage in a more or less rewarding aesthetic relationship when encountering an aesthetic object (whatsoever) and interacting with it.

In addition to latency and conditionality, dispositions are stable – they are enduring features of an object or a person, though not entirely intrinsic properties. Objects or individuals do not possess their dispositions independently of external factors. Indeed, dispositions exhibit stability in a reciprocal manner, meaning that the fourth feature that we usually attribute to them is reciprocity. Dispositions do not manifest themselves in isolation, but in cooperation with other dispositions. A crystal glass that falls and breaks does so due to the combined dispositional properties of its molecular structure and that of the floor. This reciprocal interaction highlights that the manifestation of a disposition involves reciprocal dispositional partners. This aspect becomes particularly intriguing when applying the theoretical framework of powers and dispositions to the aesthetic domain. In aesthetics, there is no manifestation of an aesthetic disposition in the "subject" without a concomitant or cor-responding manifestation of an "object" (an aesthetic object) endowed with or even consisting of aesthetic dispositional properties or active affordances. This suggests that, as both are "made of" dispositions, the dichotomy between aesthetic subjects and aesthetic objects here blurs or even disappears. Both poles represent active dispositional bundles, each of which meets the conditions of manifestation for the other; having an aesthetic experience is an encounter of dispositions[1].

2. *Dispositions in ethics: Aristotle rules*

As is well known, dispositions are the bedrock of Aristotle's ethics, with the term "hexis" (ἕξις) denoting a relatively stable arrangement or disposition, and his favourite example of dispositions are ethical virtues. Dispositions are not passive: *hexis* is not a *diathesis* (as we can read in Aristotle's *Categories* 8b), which is a shallow inclination easy to remove; *hexis* is deeper and more active; «it is the constancy of desire» (Rodrigo [2011]: 12; Di Basilio [2021]). But a disposition is not *tout-court* an activity [*energheia*] either, «it makes, perhaps, no small difference whether we place the chief good in possession or in use, in state of mind [*hexis*] or in activity. For the state of mind may exist without producing any good result, as in a man who is asleep or in some other way quite inactive, but the activity cannot», which means that dispositions may remain in a condition of latency (*Nic. Eth.* 1098b 30 ss.).

As it is explained in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, *hexeis* are cultivated through habituation. Aristotle's central argument posits that we develop virtues like justice or injustice through habitual behavior – repeated actions typical of a virtue lead to the formation of a *hexis*. For instance, engaging in repeated acts of generosity fosters a disposition toward generosity – a readiness to act generously or the power to embody generosity as a guiding principle of action. To put it differently, virtues, such as justice and temperance, are cultivated through the consistent performance of corresponding virtuous acts. However, Aristotle's doctrine does not suggest that a stable disposition or virtue inevitably emerges merely through mechanical repetition of a single type of act.

Indeed, as Aristotle explains in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1105a 30 ss.), true virtue is not possessed unless the individual performing virtuous acts (1) knows what she does; (2) chooses the act for its own sake, and (3) as the result of a permanent disposition. This is why, as mentioned in the title of this paper, «One swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a men blessed and happy» (*Nic. Eth.* 1098a 18).

Furthermore, while habitual repetition of certain actions contributes to the development of the corresponding virtue, it is crucial to recognize that the actions that *produce* a virtue are not in their inner nature but only in their external semblance like those that the virtue *produces*, because these latter are substantially enlightened by the insight into "their own principles". As argued by Zagzebski (Zagzebski [1996]: 136), a virtue (in a proper Aristotelian sense) is «a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end»; on a similar note, Woodruff ([2001]: 24) describes virtues as «habits acquired over time which are excellences of motivation, distinct from skills, even where a skill is required for successful achievement of the desired end, and which reliably enables the person to bring about the desired end». This highlights a fundamental distinction between actions that facilitate the acquisition of a virtue and those that emanate from virtue itself, once it has been acquired.

It is worth considering, within this framework, the passage in *Nic. Eth.* 1098b 3-4 where Aristotle mentions: «of first principles we see (*theōrountai*) some by induction, some by perception, some by a certain habituation (*ethismōi tini*), and others too in other ways, and we must take pains to determine them correctly, since they have a great influence of what follows». This passage is significant of Aristotle's understanding of habituation as a method of acquiring knowledge, i.e. as one of the several avenues through which certain principles and norms can be apprehended, albeit in a way which is distinct from the rigorous, deductive knowledge characteristic of disciplines like mathematics and the sciences. Through repeated practice and exposure, individuals that get habituated engage their cognitive faculties in a manner that enables them to (at least partially) un-

derstand the principles and norms governing their actions, therefore suggesting that habituation involves a *bottom-up* approach to learning or discovering principles and norms. Aristotle's perspective stresses the cognitive dimension of habituation – *intelligent habits* – and its role in shaping our understanding and adherence to ethical principles and norms (see Chappell 2012).

3. *Dispositions in aesthetics: excellence of aesthetic capacities*

As Kieran ([2012]: 13) posits, virtues in aesthetics are «intrinsically valuable excellences of character that enable us to […] appreciate all sorts of things from everyday recipes to the finest achievements of humankind». Recent scholarly discourse, notably within the Anglo-Saxon tradition, has delved into the idea of interpreting the human aesthetic through the prism of ethical virtues, as evidenced in works by Kieran (2010, 2012), McIver Lopes (2008), Goldie (2007, 2008). Broadly speaking, the virtue theory in aesthetics, as articulated by the aforementioned scholars, has placed a major emphasis on the *subject* of the aesthetic experience (their powers, inclinations, capacities and habitus), rather than on the aesthetic object. Moreover, it has tended to conceptualize the aesthetic object as the aesthetic activation of, paradigmatically, a *work of art*, thereby maintaining a clear distinction between the subject and the object of the aesthetic encounter, with a predominant focus on art.[2]

As proposed by Roberts (2018), it could prove beneficial to adopt a distinction, drawn from the field of epistemology and advocated by certain epistemologists interested in intellectual virtues, between virtue responsibilists (Roberts [2018]: 430) and virtue reliabilists. Virtue responsibilists argue that virtues constitute an integral aspect of an agent's enduring character trait, closely intertwined with their patterns of motivation, interest, and affect. Conversely, virtue reliabilists contend that virtues stem from the agent's capacity to achieve specific outcomes, such as (in the case of the aesthetic virtue) experiencing a fulfilling aesthetic encounter or enjoying aesthetic pleasure. Embracing the notion of the aesthetic virtue as grounded in the stable traits of an agent's character implies that the agent bears responsibility for this capacity, in the sense that they have acquired and nurtured this facet of their character over time, thereby transforming it into a habitual trait or habitus. Conversely, if we conceived of the aesthetic virtue as a faculty or skill, this might be innate and the subject might not necessarily have invested efforts in its cultivation or enhancement and/or might lack interest or concern for the value of the virtuous experience. This definition – of virtue as an (innate) skill – diverges from Aristotle's account, which asserts that for an act to be virtuous in the genuine sense, it must be firmly rooted in the character, the agent must possess some understanding of the principles guiding their actions

and it must result from efforts repeated in time. One may excel as an aesthetic perceiver without their faculties or skills being driven by a specific concern for the value of the experience, as noticed by Goldie (2007, 2008). In this regard, Goldie has argued that the sole genuine aesthetic virtue, or the only authentic approach to understanding the human aesthetic or human aesthetic capacity as a virtue, is to appeal to character traits rather than skills[3] (but see also Woodruff [2001], on this point). Therefore, in the subsequent sections of this text, the term "aesthetic virtue" shall denote a firmly entrenched disposition to engage or correspond with aesthetic affordances (Perullo 2024, in press) through thoughts, emotions and actions (aesthetic appreciation, acquired through time and repeated exposure).

4. *Becoming aware of our (excellent) dispositions: a role for failures*

Let us summarize the key points discussed thus far: 1) dispositions are latent, conditional, reciprocal, stable; 2) virtues for Aristotle are dispositions acquired (in the specific sense of "perfectionated") through effort, repetition and time investment, and they are excellent; 3) habituation, the practice through which dispositions as excellences emerge, is not a mechanical process but rather a means of grasping principles and norms. This implies that our (ethical) virtuous habits always engage also our cognitive powers, at least to some extent; 4) there is a distinction between the actions we repeatedly perform to acquire an (excellent) habitual disposition or virtue, and those that emerge or derive from it once the disposition has been acquired. Returning to one of the questions asked in the opening section of this paper: how do we realize or self-acknowledge, at a certain point, that we have reached the pinnacle of our habitual disposition or virtue?

Reconstructing Aristotle's conception of how stable dispositions can be self-recognized proves to be a challenging endeavour; more radically, it has been argued that the issue itself of self-acknowledging one's own possessed virtues is not inherently Aristotelian (Donato [2018]). The only point that Aristotle raises is focused on pleasure: the pleasure that one feels in performing a virtuous action indicates that a stable *hexis* has been acquired (*Nic. Eth*. II 3 1104b 3 ss: «We must take as a sign of states of character the pleasure or pain that supervenes upon acts […] For moral virtue is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of the pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this the right education»). However, Aristotle does not offer a detailed explanation of the specific type of pleasure that serves as a true indicator of a genuinely acquired *hexis*. Pleasure, particularly in

aesthetics, *leghetai pollakòs* and Aristotle is aware of the difficulty, inasmuch he stresses that the pleasure (or happiness) we get «from an isolated swallow» should not be confused with the pleasure (or happiness) deriving from «a whole summer», as in the passage I have quoted in the preceding section, and which gives its title to this essay. His emphasis on this distinction implies that getting confused about these two kinds of pleasure is not so uncommon. One might concur with Marmodoro (Marmodoro [2009]) that stable dispositions (virtues) and their manifestations are not separate entities, and that the manifested disposition is the same disposition as the one in potentiality, only in a state of activity, but the difficulty does not disappear.

Furthermore, pleasure (see Donato [2018]) appears insufficient in providing individuals with a robust, enduring awareness of their acquired stable dispositions. Pleasure, by its nature, is transient, lasting only for fleeting moments. This implies that the awareness of acquisition is anchored solely to the present moment. But what happens *post festum*, once the pleasure subsides? We know that dispositions are stable; they endure even when not actively manifested; they persist in a latent state, devoid of accompanying pleasure; but how do individuals self-recognize this "latent" state? Aristotle offers no explicit answers beyond the intermittent, momentary experience of pleasure. Many philosophers following Aristotle, including Thomas von Aquinas, have attempted to address this perceived deficiency or lacuna in Aristotle's theory, which they viewed – correctly or not – as a limitation (Donato [2018]).

As I approach the conclusion of this paper, I would like to suggest a change in perspective, about aesthetic habitus and self-acknowledgement, that may serve as the foundation for future analyses: rather than focusing on pleasure as a direct indicator of the presence of acquired (aesthetic) virtues my suggestion is to shift the focus from pleasure to aesthetic failures, as a means of indirectly, *ex negativo* grasping one's excellent aesthetic virtue or habitus.

I refer among other sources, in this regard, to a recent paper by Bertinetto, Andrzejewski (2021), wherein they advocate for a re-evaluation of failures and mistakes in artistic and aesthetic appreciation as avenues for attaining genuine aesthetic satisfaction and as a valuable, albeit risky, artistic/aesthetic strategy. Bertinetto and Andrzejewski identify two possible ways in which failures and mistakes can open new possibilities for a deeper and more fulfilling aesthetic experience, one centered on imagination and the other on expectations. They write: when a viewer or an aesthetic perceiver undergoes an experience of failure or mistake, such as an unsatisfactory ending to a book, movie, or artistic performance, they are «given the chance to imagine [their] own alternative solution, for example [their] own ending, to correct the failure and, thus, imaginatively make Y perfect (and successful) in reference to what [they] take as the standard of success», which can be (aesthetically) extremely satisfying. Focusing on ex-

pectations and norms, they also argue that «failure as imperfection with respect to a predetermined normative aesthetic canon can simply overturn our expectations, taking us by surprise and provoking an aesthetic pleasure intensified precisely by lack of expectation. In this case, as claimed by Yuriko Saito, "Rather than imposing a predetermined idea of what beauty has to be, we are letting the object in various forms speak to us even if at first it may defy our usual expectations of beauty" (Saito 2017, §2)» (Bertinetto, Andrzejewski [2021]: 18).

I posit that this capacity to effectively address and relaunch the aesthetic "issue" by leveraging failures is precisely contingent upon possessing an already stable, deeply ingrained aesthetic habitus (or disposition or power). A sporadic aesthetic skill, not fully developed yet, would falter in the face of failures, remaining mired in them. Conversely, a rooted, firmly acquired aesthetic virtue would have the capacity to capitalize on failures to expand, renegotiate and deepen the aesthetic experience through the allocation of additional imaginative and improvisational resources. In this sense, every time an individual adopts a constructive approach towards failures and mistakes, this approach may serve as an indirect indicator, to some extent transparent to the individual themselves and to the observers, of them possessing a genuine aesthetic virtue. The advantage of focusing on failures as a sign of a stable aesthetic disposition, rather than on pleasure, mainly consists in failures ensuring an access to continuity which is not available to pleasure. Indeed, as said, pleasure is transient by its nature, lasting only for fleeting moments. This implies that, if we focus on pleasure, the awareness of the acquisition of the habitus is anchored solely to the present moment. But what happens once the pleasure subsides? Unlike pleasure, when an aesthetic perceiver endowed with a stable and enduring aesthetic habitus encounters failures, this is at the same time an experience of setback *and* of relaunch of the aesthetic issues in new terms, therefore of dis-continuity (due to the unmet and frustrated expectations) and of continuity (due to the setback becoming, simultaneously, a chance for successful transformation, both of the norms regulating the aesthetic experience and of the expectations of the perceiver; see Bertinetto, Andrzejewski [2021]). If I had to suggest an image to visualize the development of an aesthetic experience relying on a genuine *hexis*, this would be a serpentine line with typically karstic features, rather than a broken line.

In a poignant reflection in one of his books, Roger Fry once wrote: «There are days of lowered vitality when one may wander disconsolately in a gallery like the Louvre, in despair at one's incapacity to respond to the appeal of the great masters, whom one had thought to be one's friends, but who suddenly seem to speak an alien tongue» (Fry [1951]: 40). In light of his past experiences, and of a repeated, habitual practice with works of art, Fry legitimately expected to be able to engage in some rewarding aesthetic dialogue with the Louvre's great masters, but – much to his despair – that day nothing happened. He failed. In the

wake of such an experience, one might wonder how Fry coped with this sense of failure. Did he endeavour to revisit the gallery in subsequent days, hoping for a renewed connection with the masters? Did he persist in his efforts to engage with the artworks, seeking to re-ignite and re-negotiate the aesthetic dialogue that had previously enriched his experiences? Did he capitalize on this failure, exploring through it new avenues for an aesthetic cor-responding?

As said, failures and unsuccessful aesthetic encounters – if experienced constructively – can signal the stability of an aesthetic disposition that has been cultivated to such a level of excellence that it is prepared to reassess its norms, principles and expectations according to the contingencies of the aesthetic encounter, rather than being overwhelmed or extinguished or blocked by failures. It is worth noticing that this disposition, once it has been "made perfect", is stable in the only manner an aesthetic virtue can be stable: *briefly and (im-)provisionally*, i.e. blending habitual stability with improvisation, frustration with transformation, constancy with contingency, therefore able to cor-respond to the mutability and variability of the things in the world. In the quest for self-awareness of one's acquired virtue, the rhythm and temporality of the *aesthetic hexis* emerges as discrete, fragmented (i.e., susceptible to failures) *and* continuous, and the more so the further one progresses in the process of habituation.

Indeed, Friedrich Nietzsche's eloquent portrayal of "brief habits" in the *The Gay Science* resonates with this notion of a fleeting yet profound, flexible yet stable, sweet-bitter habitual experience that I am discussing here: «I love brief habits and consider them invaluable means for getting to know many things and states down to the bottom of their sweetnesses and bitternesses […]. I always believe this will give me lasting satisfaction – even brief habits have this faith of passion, this faith in eternity – and that I am to be envied for having found and recognized it, and now it nourishes me at noon and in the evening and spreads a deep contentment around itself and into me, so that I desire nothing else, without having to compare, despise, or hate. And one day its time is up; the good thing parts from me, not as something that now disgusts me but peacefully and sated with me, as I with it, and as if we ought to be grateful to each other and so shake hands to say farewell. And already the new waits at the door» (Nietzsche 1882, aphorism 295; see Portera 2024). In my interpretation, Nietzsche's portrayal of these bitter-sweet brief habits, which may be considered as paradigmatically aesthetic, suggests that brief habits rely on a dynamically stable "subjective" ground – a virtue or habitus or *hexis* – that becomes apparent only indirectly through the succession of relational disenchantments – perhaps of delusions. In other words, a stable *hexis* becomes apparent in that ephemeral moment in which one singular habit has declined and the subsequent one, altough not fully developed yet, is on its way to arise.

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Notes

1 As mentioned, I argue here – although space constraints preclude a detailed exploration of the topic in this paper – that the two poles involved in the aesthetic encounter, which for the sake of simplicity may be called subjective pole and objective pole, have both dispositional nature; more than this, through the adoption of the dispositional approach the very distinction between a subjective pole and an objective pole of the aesthetic encounter blurs. As for the potentiality and limitations of the idea of interpreting aesthetic properties (of the object) through the lens of dispositions, see for instance Levinson 2001, 2005. In this paper, my focus is however restricted to dispositions as powers or virtues of the subjective pole.

2 As mentioned in Note 1, in this paper, my interest is primarily focused on the dispositional/habitual properties of the *subjective pole* (temporarily and for the sake of brevity and clarity, I still use here the label "subject/object"). However, I am aware (see Note 1) of the existing literature regarding the dispositional interpretation of the aesthetic properties (*of the object*). A further development of this paper will involve examining how the application of the dispositional lens can contribute to rethinking the subject-object poles in aesthetics in a non-dichotomous manner.

3 Roberts, however, argues that: «any complete account of aesthetic virtue must make essential reference to the faculties of the agent», that is to her skills; moreover, «it is not always possible to fully specify the trait virtues without appeal to corresponding faculty virtues» (Roberts [2018]: 437).