

*Elena Romagnoli\**

## **Between Repetition and Occasion. A Gadamerian Contribution to Everyday Aesthetics**

### **1. Introduction**

According to the traditional reading of Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophy, his aesthetics is based on an ontological concept of "image" as the emanation of the original, inherited from Neoplatonic philosophy<sup>1</sup>: a concept that has been accused of classicism and considered incapable of accounting for contemporary aesthetic phenomena, such as installations or Body Art<sup>2</sup>. In reality, it is possible to show a different Gadamerian paradigm that conceptualizes the aesthetic phenomenon, not as an object but rather as a practice, a path opened by the concept of "play" inaugurated by Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960) and developed in his subsequent essays<sup>3</sup>. Based on this, and on a reassessment of hermeneutics in a dialogue with "pragmatist aesthetics"<sup>4</sup>, it is possible to rethink Gadamer's aesthetics as a philosophy of interaction, that is capable

\* Freie Universität Berlin

<sup>1</sup> See TM 141. On this point, see the relevant works of J. Grondin, *The Universality of Hermeneutic Understanding. The Strong, Somewhat Metaphysical Conclusion of Truth and Method*, in *The Gadamerian Mind*, ed. by T. George, G.-H. van der Heiden, Routledge, London 2021, pp. 24-36.

<sup>2</sup> See, among others, the strong critique of J.D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1987. In contrast, Cynthia Nielsen stressed the relevance of Gadamer for the phenomena of Jazz: C.R. Nielsen, *Gadamer and the Event of Art, the Other, and a Gesture Toward a Gadamerian Approach to Free Jazz*, in "Journal of Applied Hermeneutics" March 2016, <https://doi.org/10.11575/jah.v0i0.53277>.

<sup>3</sup> For a different paradigm of Gadamer's aesthetics see C.R. Nielsen, *Gadamer's Hermeneutical Aesthetics. Art as a Performative, Dynamic, Communal Event*, Routledge, New York-London 2022. For a conception of art as human praxis, see G.W. Bertram, *Kunst als menschliche Praxis. Eine Ästhetik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 2014, transl. by N. Ross, *Art as Human Praxis. An Aesthetics*, Bloomsbury, New York 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Here, I cannot delve into this argument; I have stated this thesis in E. Romagnoli, *From a Remote Pedestal to Everyday Life. The Social Role of Art in Gadamer and Dewey*, in "European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy", 14, 1, 2022, <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/2760>.

of taking into account not only contemporary artistic phenomena but also extra-artistic aesthetic experiences. My intention is to show how, thus reconsidered, Gadamer's aesthetics can contribute to solving some pressing questions of *Everyday Aesthetics*, by leveraging Gadamer's anti-exceptionalist views towards a continuistic conception of artistic phenomena and everyday life.

Gadamer criticized the outcomes of the "aesthetic consciousness"<sup>5</sup> which originated in post-Kantian philosophy and then grew into the aestheticism of contemporary aesthetics, blamed for operating by "aesthetic differentiation", i.e., in abstraction from any connection with reality, giving rise to the musealization of art<sup>6</sup>. Contrary to this, Gadamer works out a *continuistic* aesthetics, against the separation and abstraction of artistic experience from everyday life, related to connection and continuity with social human lives. Against the monadic temporal suspension of the common life of the spectator, as operated by the aesthetic consciousness, Gadamer recalls indeed that "a spectator's ecstatic self-forgetfulness corresponds to his continuity with himself. Precisely that in which one loses oneself as a spectator demands that one grasp the continuity of meaning"<sup>7</sup>. By leveraging such continuity, hermeneutics can be redirected towards everyday life, in consideration of aesthetic phenomena of ordinary experiences. A path not explicit in Gadamer's reflection, but one that contemporary hermeneutics can fruitfully walk on.

Without any presumption of exhaustivity, I will try to point to a possible path for hermeneutics in the context of *Everyday Aesthetics*. First of all, I will explain in which sense Gadamer's philosophy can support the "expansive" approach of this branch. Then, I will analyse the contribution provided to everyday aesthetics by the two concepts of "repetition" and "occasion"<sup>8</sup>, starting with Gadamer fundamental retrieval of occasional and decorative arts against a conception of art as the product of artistic genius and recalling the social continuity of aesthetic experiences: the mutual dynamic of repetition and occasion can properly describe ordinary aesthetics phenomena.

<sup>5</sup> TM 81 ff.

<sup>6</sup> TM 79 ff. A point also developed by J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1934, in *The Later Works*, vol. 10, ed. by J. Ann Boydston, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale-Edwardsville 2008<sup>2</sup>, pp. 12-18. See also R. Dreon, *La «distinción de lo estético» en clave pragmatista. Dewey, Gadamer y la antropología de la cultura*, in *John Dewey: una estética de este mundo*, ed. by L. Arenas, R. del Castillo, Á. M. Faerna, Prensas De La Universidad De Zaragoza, Zaragoza 2018, pp. 213-233.

<sup>7</sup> TM 130

<sup>8</sup> Of course, these concepts could be considered in an exceptionalist way that places emphasis on the concept of sacred art as the dominant paradigm. However, I claim that in Gadamer's work there is the possibility of a different consideration, something that goes in the direction of pragmatist aesthetics.

## 2. Gadamer's Aesthetics and the Expansive Approach

As is known, *Everyday Aesthetics* is a line of enquiries of contemporary aesthetics that was born out of the work of Katya Mandoki, Yuriko Saito and Thomas Leddy<sup>9</sup> in the early 2000s, in the Anglo-American tradition, and was then taken up in the context of Northern European philosophy (especially the Finnish one). Currently, *Everyday Aesthetics* is consistently attracting aesthetic reflections: this does not only imply an extension of the possibilities of aesthetics as a discipline, but also (and above all) a rethinking of the social role of such aesthetic phenomena, which touch the lives of individuals in a 'horizontal' sense and can therefore lead to ethical and political considerations<sup>10</sup>.

*Everyday Aesthetics* refers, more or less critically, to John Dewey's aesthetics, as well as to Richard Shusterman's questioning of the separation between the high arts and the popular arts<sup>11</sup>, and aims to broaden the concept of aesthetics in order to question the separation between the sphere of art and the everyday sphere, traditionally considered unworthy of philosophical examination. As of today, this field of study includes very heterogeneous positions and knows no accurate boundaries, as Elisabetta Di Stefano aptly highlighted<sup>12</sup>. I am interested in showing how rethinking Gadamer's aesthetics towards a processual understanding of art may allow us to show Gadamer's potential contribution to this aesthetic strand, by accepting the *desideratum* of providing *Everyday Aesthetics*, which originated in the American milieu, with a solid rooting in the categories of the so called Continental European tradition<sup>13</sup>. In this direction, it is possible to highlight the centrality of Gadamer's aesthetics as a philosophy of continuity with anti-elitist overtones, capable of being developed in an anti-exceptionalist direction.

<sup>9</sup> See K. Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture, and Social Identities*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2007; Y. Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2007; T. Leddy, *Everyday Surface Aesthetic Qualities: "Neat", "Messy", "Clean", "Dirty"*, in "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism», 53, 3, 1995, pp. 259-268, and T. Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, Broadview Press, Peterborough 2012.

<sup>10</sup> See A. Berleant, *Ideas for a Social Aesthetic*, in *Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, ed. by A. Light, J.M. Smith, *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, Columbia University Press, New York 2005, pp. 23-38.

<sup>11</sup> See J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, and R. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics. Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, Second Edition, Rowman and Littlefield, New York 2012, pp. 139-235.

<sup>12</sup> See E. Di Stefano, *Che cos'è l'estetica quotidiana*, Carocci, Roma 2017, pp. 11-35.

<sup>13</sup> See G.L. Iannilli, G. Matteucci, *Modes of Experience: Everyday Aesthetics between Erlebnis, Erfahrung, and Lebenswelt*, in "The Slovak Journal of Aesthetics", 10, 2, 2021, pp. 39-55: pp. 50 ff. Despite the two authors taking a critical perspective towards hermeneutics, and in particular towards Gadamer's development of the concept of *Erlebnis*.

In particular, Gadamer's aesthetics could contribute to the "expansive" approach of the *Everyday Aesthetics*, which differs from the "reductive" approach<sup>14</sup> in that it aims to extend aesthetics to everyday experiences by finding "the extraordinary in the ordinary", as Leddy<sup>15</sup> suggestively defined it. As Giovanni Matteucci points out<sup>16</sup>, the reductive approach, on the other hand, postulates a discontinuity between artistic and everyday aesthetic phenomena and rejects the adoption of categories traditionally employed for the Great art, thus entailing a *dualistic* treatment of aesthetics, which should deal with two distinct domains: that of art and that of everyday life. On the contrary, the expansive approach considers it appropriate to apply the same aesthetic categories to both cases, precisely because of the *continuity* between everyday phenomena and art. The reference to the everyday, however, does not hint at the typical aesthetization of aestheticism – i.e. making everything a work of art – which Gadamer explicitly criticized. It would be rather a sort of "aesthetic egalitarianism"<sup>17</sup>, according to Matteucci's claim: "The other continuistic option is that of considering art as an accentuation and intensification of aesthetic elements already operative in common experience, thus making a Copernican revolution of the system of relations between the world of art and everyday life"<sup>18</sup>.

The expansive approach of *Everyday Aesthetics* fits in well with the reassessment of Gadamer's aesthetics as interaction and performance: indeed "the encroachments between art and life that characterise contemporary performance practices make it plausible to use the conceptual System of art also for *Everyday Aesthetics*"<sup>19</sup>. In fact, for Gadamer, aes-

<sup>14</sup> On the former, see T. Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*, and C. Dowling, *The Aesthetics of Daily Life*, in "British Journal of Aesthetics", 50, 3, 2010, pp. 225-242; on the latter, see Y. Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2007, A. Haapala, *On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place*, in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, ed. by A. Light, J. M. Smith, Columbia University Press, New York 2005, pp. 39-55, and K. Melchionne, *The Point of Everyday Aesthetics*, "Contemporary Aesthetics", 11, 2014, <https://contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=700&searchstr=melchionne>. In particular, Haapala is strongly influenced by Heidegger's philosophy, stressing the concepts of familiarity and identity of places. For an overview of the panorama of studies in *Everyday Aesthetics*, see G.L. Iannilli, *Everyday Aesthetics*, in "International Lexicon of Aesthetics", Autumn 2018, <https://lexicon.mimesisjournals.com/archive/2018/autumn/EverydayAesthetics>.

<sup>15</sup> See T. Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*.

<sup>16</sup> See G. Matteucci, *The Aesthetic as a Matter of Practices: Form of Life in Everydayness and Art*, in "Comprendre", 18, 2, 2016, pp. 9-28.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, p. 13

<sup>18</sup> Ivi, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> See Di Stefano, *Che cos'è l'estetica quotidiana*, p. 32. In this direction Dowling affirmed that "it seems that my recommending a particular meal (a token of which I have just consumed) is no more problematic than my recommending you attend tonight's performance of *La Bohème* based on my assessment of the sounds that have long died away after last night's performance. While there are clearly some interesting issues to investigate in this

thetic experience is not limited to the work of art as an object opposed to a subject, but is rather reconceptualized as a living and dynamic human activity, in continuity with ordinary experience: “The identity of the work is not guaranteed by any classical or formalist criteria, but is secured by the way in which we take the construction of the work upon ourselves as a task”<sup>20</sup>. In particular, this emerges in the conception of art as a play, based on presentation [*Darstellung*], and, moreover, on the assumption that “all presentation is potentially a representation for someone. That this possibility is intended is the characteristic feature of art as play”<sup>21</sup>. This implies, then, a movement and an interaction between audience and public: “Basically the difference between the player and the spectator is here superseded. The requirement that the play itself be intended in its meaningfulness is the same for both”<sup>22</sup>. The unity of the work lies only in its unceasing motion: “It is quite wrong to think that the unity of the work implies that the work is closed off from the person who turns to it or is affected by it”<sup>23</sup>. In contrast with a dimension of the work of art as an object, Gadamer explicitly stated: “The work of art is precisely not the product that is finished when the artist’s work on it is done. Also, the artwork is not at all an object that one can approach with a measuring tape in one’s hand”<sup>24</sup>. The emphasis on the dimension of movement and interaction at the basis of Gadamer’s aesthetics makes it possible to thematise as aesthetic not only specific objects of everyday life (e.g. design objects), but also practices or activities, such as watering flowers or tasting a wine.

*Everyday Aesthetics* draws on Dewey’s philosophical continuum<sup>25</sup> according to which every experience has an aesthetic aspect making it

domain, I see no reason to cast an adequate art-centred aesthetic as too restrictive to accommodate the multi-sensory nature of some everyday aesthetic experiences [C. Dowling, *The Aesthetics of Daily Life*, p. 237]”. Barbara Formis also drew attention to the link between *Everyday Aesthetics* and the performing arts in B. Formis, *Esthétique de la vie ordinaire*, PUF, Paris 2010.

<sup>20</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful. Art as Play, Symbol and Festival*, in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, ed. by R. Bernasconi, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 3-53: p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> TM 113.

<sup>22</sup> TM 114.

<sup>23</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *The Artwork in Word and Image: “So True, So Full of Being!”*, in *The Gadamer Reader. A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. by R.E. Palmer, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois 2007, pp. 192-226: p. 214.

<sup>25</sup> See K. Puolakka, *Dewey and Everyday Aesthetics. A New Look*, in “Contemporary Aesthetics”, 12, 2014, [https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts\\_contempaesthetics/vol12/iss1/18/](https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol12/iss1/18/); G.L. Iannilli, *L’estetico e il quotidiano. Design, Everyday Aesthetics*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2019; T. Leddy, *A Deweyan Approach to the Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics*, in “European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy”, 13, 1, 2021, <https://journals.openedition.org/ejppap/2273>.

integral, even though a difference exists between ordinary experience and proper aesthetic experience. Similarly, Gadamer's aesthetics also has a continuistic and integral conception at its core: the essays that followed *Truth and Method*, in particular *The Relevance of the Beautiful. Art as Play, Symbol and Festival* (1975), stress the continuity between the ordinary experience of human beings and aesthetic experience. This emerges in the concept of play<sup>26</sup> that acts as the *trait d'union* between the human world and the natural world, although in human it takes on a peculiar perfection that leads it precisely to become an artwork. In *The Play of Art* (1977), Gadamer explicitly claimed: "If we wish to avoid the interpretative framework of the dogmatic Cartesian philosophy of self-consciousness, it seems to me methodologically advisable to seek out just such transitional phenomena [*Übergangspänomene*] between human and animal life"<sup>27</sup>. Play represents the aesthetic experience *qua* relational, which is identified as properly artistic when performed for a spectator: a common trait connects everyday and artistic experience. By leveraging such aspect, hermeneutics may be directed towards the aesthetics of the everyday, as opposed to the dualistic tendency of the reductive approach, which proposes the same dualism that traditional aesthetics defended, by separating the Great art from common phenomena. Only a relational and continuistic perspective can account for the social bearing of aesthetics, bringing together the arts and the aesthetic phenomena that every individual can enjoy in everyday life.

One should note that Dan Eugen Ratiu had already referred to Gadamer's philosophy in an expansive direction, in order to develop *Everyday Aesthetics* as "practical" aesthetics. Ratiu has focused on the link between Gadamer's practical philosophy and Aristotle's *phronesis*, referring to concepts taken from the humanistic tradition (*Bildung*, judgment, *sensus communis*, and taste)<sup>28</sup> in order to construct a relational conception of aesthetics. He aims at stressing the concept of human life "as a whole", meant as the totality of private and public experience at the basis of ordinary life: "It means that the discreteness of experiences or aspects of life is preserved in the 'hermeneutic continuity of human existence', for the experiencing self is structured as a 'unity in division

<sup>26</sup> See TM 106-114.

<sup>27</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *The Play of Art*, in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, ed. by R. Bernasconi, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 123-130: p. 125. See also H.-G. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> D.E. Ratiu, *Everyday Aesthetic Experience: Exploration by a Practical Aesthetics*, in C. Friberg, R. Vasquez (ed. by), *Experiencing the Everyday*, NSU Press, Copenhagen 2017, pp. 22-52, pp. 32 ff. See also D.E. Ratiu, *Remapping the Realm of Aesthetics: On Recent Controversies about the Aesthetic and Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life*, in "Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics", 50 / 6, 1, 2013, pp. 3-26.

and articulation' in terms of Gadamer"<sup>29</sup>. Ratiu has then drawn attention to the fundamental concepts of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* for a redefinition of experience within *Everyday Aesthetics*, in particular in contrast to the "monadic-isolation premise" embraced by the line of enquiry in Everyday aesthetics (Määttänen; Mandoki)<sup>30</sup> that considers "everyday aesthetic life as a mere *private* world in absolute discontinuity with the *public* world"<sup>31</sup> (not only the art-world, but also other forms of public everyday aesthetic experience) and thus ignoring or neglecting its intersubjective dimension"<sup>32</sup>.

While agreeing with Ratiu's assumptions, I consider promising here focusing on the Gadamerian concepts of repetition and occasion, which emerge from an interpretation of Gadamer's aesthetics as interaction<sup>33</sup>, highlighting the contribution these can make to the expansive approach of *Everyday Aesthetics*. Indeed, while it is true that *Everyday Aesthetics* must include some traditionally excluded aesthetic phenomena that are nonetheless worthy of constituting aesthetic experiences, this does not imply that every human activity (e.g. doing the laundry or feeding the cat) should be considered an aesthetic phenomenon, as Di Stefano rightly points out<sup>34</sup>. A distinction must therefore be made between aesthetic phenomena and merely insignificant and banal phenomena, from an aesthetic point of view: as Leddy highlighted, this is a distinction between things in everyday life that are made special through actions or in our perception, and things that are not<sup>35</sup>. From this perspective, the dynamic of repetition and occasion, which Gadamer develops in relation to artistic practices, can also be adequately applied to common experiences.

<sup>29</sup> D.E. Ratiu, *Everyday Aesthetic Experience*, p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> K. Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture, and Social Identities*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2007; P. Määttänen, *Aesthetics of Movement and Everyday Aesthetics*, in "Contemporary Aesthetics" 1, 2005, [https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts\\_contempaesthetics/vol0/iss1/5](https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol0/iss1/5).

<sup>31</sup> D.E. Ratiu, *Everyday Aesthetic Experience*, p. 37.

<sup>32</sup> Ivi, p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> D.E. Ratiu, *Everyday Aesthetic Experience*, p. 40. Concerning the conceptual couple *Erlebnis-Erfahrung* as worked out by Dilthey and developed with reference to *Everyday Aesthetics*, see B. Highmore, *Ordinary Lives. Studies in the Everyday*, Routledge, London 2011, pp. 65-70.

<sup>34</sup> See E. Di Stefano, *Che cos'è l'estetica quotidiana*, p. 33. See P. Rautio, *On Hanging Laundry: The Place of Beauty in Managing Everyday Aesthetics*, in "Contemporary Aesthetics", 7 2009, [https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts\\_contempaesthetics/vol7/iss1/7/](https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol7/iss1/7/).

<sup>35</sup> Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*, p. 76.

### 3. Repetition and Uniqueness

Repetition underlies everyday activities: what distinguishes between an exceptional phenomenon and an ordinary one would be its unique and non-repeatable character. However, Gadamer's aesthetic conception is underpinned by the consideration that the aesthetic phenomenon is unique and at the same time always repeatable. An event is always iterable without this leading to a loss of its distinctive aesthetic character: that is, the dimension of repetition is not limited to the sphere of what is common and becomes mere routine, which underlies aesthetic events, as in the case of the "festival", understood as an emblem of art<sup>36</sup>.

Gadamer interprets art as iterability: that is to say, as a phenomenon that repeats itself identically while, paradoxically, being different each time. This reading of art also allows us to show how the Gadamerian conception fits into the aesthetic debate of the twentieth century: Gadamer's concept of "festival"<sup>37</sup> allows us to highlight the iterable character of art, which implies its being intrinsically temporal and therefore changing, and its having a social character, its ability to gather a community. Already in the pages of *Truth and Method*, and then in *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, Gadamer refers to the presentation of the work of art as a presentation of a "structure [*Gebilde*]" that remains identical, a fact that allows us to identify that work as a specific work of art<sup>38</sup>. However, each presentation of such work is different from the others: "Here 'repetition [*Wiederholung*]' does not mean that something is literally repeated – i.e., can be reduced to something original. Rather, every repetition is as original as the work itself"<sup>39</sup>. The intrinsic temporality of aesthetic phenomena is expressed by Gadamer with reference to the concept of festival, especially in the case of periodic festivals: the main quality of a festival is that it exists only in its "being celebrated"<sup>40</sup>. The distinctive feature of a celebration is that it changes over time, while remaining identical: for example, the celebration of the 14<sup>th</sup> July commemorates the same unique

<sup>36</sup> This concept is referred to the temporal continuity of art, as opposed to "aesthetic consciousness": "It is precisely continuity that every understanding of time has to achieve, even when it is a question of the temporality of a work of art [TM 125]".

<sup>37</sup> On the Gadamerian conception of the festival, see J. Grondin, *Play, Festival and Ritual in Gadamer. On the Theme of the Immemorial in his Later Works*, in *Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, ed. by L.K. Schmidt, Lexington Books, Lanham 2001, pp. 43-50; N. Keane, *The Temporality of Artwork and Festival and the Temporality of the Cosmos: Gadamer's Reflections on Time and Eternity*, in "Continental Philosophy Review", 55, 2022, pp. 335-351, and I. Scheibler, *Art as Festival in Heidegger and Gadamer*, in "International Journal of Philosophical Studies", 9, 2, 2022, pp. 151-175.

<sup>38</sup> TM 115. See also TM 120.

<sup>39</sup> TM 126.

<sup>40</sup> TM 121.



event, the Storming of the Bastille in 1789, but every year the festival is differently repeated (as we experienced during the pandemic, when our way of celebrating dramatically changed).

On this basis, Gadamer claimed that the original essence of celebration is that “thus its own original essence is always to be something different (even when celebrated in exactly the same way)”<sup>41</sup>. With reference to the Aristotelian conception, he also emphasises that an entity which is continuously different from itself is temporal in the highest degree: “An entity that exists only by always being something different is temporal in a more radical sense than everything that belongs to history. It has its being only in becoming and return”<sup>42</sup>. This reading of the festival as an emblem of the work of art shows that the latter has its essence in movement and becoming, as opposed to a conception of the work as a static and definitively fixed product. This changing character, however, does not imply that the work of art is devoid of a unifying criterion and is open to any alteration whatsoever: “A festival exists only in being celebrated. This is not to say that it is of a subjective character and has its being only in the subjectivity of those celebrating it. Rather, the festival is celebrated because it is there”<sup>43</sup>. It is between these two extremes – fixity on the one hand and total openness on the other – that Gadamer’s aesthetics moves, and finds a convincing solution: art is an iterability that refers to a form.

Gadamer’s reference to the festival should not be understood in the sense of exceptionalism, but on the contrary as the conception of a phenomenon resting on social grounds, a collective event shared by the community that breaks with the merely isolationist reading of aesthetic experience. Certainly, the festival could be understood in relation to a sacred paradigm that breaks from ordinary life<sup>44</sup>. However, it is possible to leverage a different reading of the festival, based on the central role played by its continuity with the lives of the participants, as opposed to a paradigm of art based on the model of the creation by the artistic genius, “the aesthetic myth of freely creative imagination”<sup>45</sup>, as Gadamer has frequently stressed. In this direction, the festival should be understood as an anti-exceptionalist conception, stressing the continuity and social value of art: “However much the tragic play performed solemnly in the theatre presents an exceptional situation in everyone’s life, it is not an experience

<sup>41</sup> TM 126.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> The sacred paradigm of the festival is partly present in the Gadamerian reading, which certainly has an ontological aim, as it emerges in the pages of *Truth and Method* dealing with the sacred image. See also an essay, strongly influenced by Heidegger, H.-G. Gadamer, *Über leere und erfüllte Zeit*, in *GW IV*, pp. 137-153.

<sup>45</sup> TM 134.

of an adventure producing a temporary intoxication from which one reawakens to one's true being; instead, the elevation and strong emotion that seize the spectator in fact deepen his *continuity with himself*<sup>46</sup>.

The social and horizontal nature of the festival has been remarked by Gadamer, who stated that "a festival is an experience of community and represents community in its most perfect form. A festival is meant for everyone"<sup>47</sup>, as well as by Shusterman whose early writings were also deeply influenced by Gadamerian philosophy<sup>48</sup>. In his review of the English translation of Gadamer's essays, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Shusterman points out that for Gadamer there is a connection between high arts and popular arts, thus exposing the social undercurrents of Gadamer's reflections, and defining Gadamer as "always a proponent of unity and continuity"<sup>49</sup> who, in the concepts of play, symbol and celebration, looks for a possible answer to the role of art. Shusterman identifies play as the anthropological component of Gadamer's philosophy, as well as the basis for the possibility of rethinking the relationship between the work of art and the public; the symbol stands for the impossibility to equate and reduce the work of art to the merely conceptual; the festival instead shows the collective and communitarian dimension of the work of art. Namely, "Gadamer does not try to show how art as commonly understood (i.e. the art of high culture) is meant for everyone, which it is obviously not. He instead challenges the view that 'our art is simply that of the ruling class' by treating mass media entertainment as art"<sup>50</sup>.

Carsten Friberg too highlighted this element in order to show a mutual influence between hermeneutics and *Everyday Aesthetics*, regarded as two separate approaches to aesthetic phenomena. Though along a different route (he stresses the relevance of knowledge as a potential contribution of hermeneutics to *Everyday Aesthetics*), he also agrees that the reference to the festival is a social element: "To follow Gadamer, the artist now creates a community. While the religious festival intended a universal community, and some artistic ambitions of the avantgarde did likewise for a political community, this is also a characteristic we can apply in moderate forms, such as the props of a music festival and a subcultural community. Aesthetics is not about the content of the interpretation, but

<sup>46</sup> TM 134.

<sup>47</sup> Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, p. 39.

<sup>48</sup> See R. Shusterman, *T.S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism*, Columbia University Press, New York 1988. On the influence of Gadamer on Shusterman's philosophy, see A. Kremer, *Art as Experience: Gadamer and Pragmatist Aesthetics*, in *Aesthetics Experience and Somaesthetics*, ed. by R. Shusterman, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2018, pp. 43-55.

<sup>49</sup> Review of "*The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*", in "History of European Ideas", 9, 6, 1988, pp. 751-752, p. 751.

<sup>50</sup> Ivi, p. 752.

about the means of it”<sup>51</sup>. On this basis, he can state that “hence, the exception to the everyday does not rule out aesthetic dimensions of ordinary artefacts and situations. However, the interest in the exceptional is emphasized when a visit to the art museum can be said to change our views”<sup>52</sup>. I claim that the fact that “the hermeneutic perspective does not exclude more trivial examples of the everyday, it just takes more interest in the significant moments”<sup>53</sup> could be highlighted by the mutual dynamics of repetition (on the basis of the festival) and occasion, as I will show.

On this basis, there is in Gadamer the attribution of a social character to the repetition of celebration and art in general that can also apply to the ordinary aesthetic experience. Repetition does not entail a “loss of aura”<sup>54</sup> or a weakening of the phenomenon’s relevance; on the contrary, Gadamer’s reflection manages to hold together the essence of the phenomenon in its dynamic of iterability and uniqueness. Repetition is a concept that can account for both artistic phenomena – such as the performance of a play, whose representation and thus repetition is identical and different each time – and everyday phenomena with aesthetic elements, such as drinking coffee every day at the same café, where, however, we can taste always new nuances of flavour, for example depending on our mood or on the atmosphere we feel around the other customers. It is obvious, however, that not every self-repeating phenomenon can be considered aesthetic, which is partly why we need to identify a normative criterion in *Everyday Aesthetics* to prevent phenomena that we would certainly regard as non-aesthetic from being included into it. The concept of occasion, little emphasized in the context of Gadamerian studies, can provide valuable help in this sense.

#### 4. The Reappraisal of Decorative Arts and the Concept of Occasion

That being said, there is an anti-exceptionalist view of aesthetic phenomena at the core of the concept of repetition. However, what distinguishes repetition from mere meaningless routine, which is typical of actions that we would certainly not define as aesthetic, is precisely the *occasion*, a concept that Gadamer employs in *Truth and Method* to refer to the specific situation in which each work of art is placed. In particular,

<sup>51</sup> C. Friberg, *Everyday Aesthetics and Philosophical Hermeneutics*, in “The Slovak Journal of Aesthetics”, 10, 2, 2021, p. 106.

<sup>52</sup> Ivi, p. 107.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>54</sup> On this point, the Gadamerian conception would agree with T. Leddy, *Experience of Awe: An Expansive Approach to Everyday Aesthetics*, “Contemporary Aesthetics”, 13, 2015, [https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts\\_contempaesthetics/vol10/iss1/8/](https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol10/iss1/8/).

this reflection takes its cue from the reappraisal of the decorative arts and the so-called “occasional” arts, showing how the criterion of occasionality joins both the performing arts and figurative arts, as well as decoration and simple ornamentation<sup>55</sup>. Gadamer develops such argument as a critique of the aesthetic differentiation and musealisation of art, as well as the cult of the artistic genius: “If we begin with the fact that the work of art cannot be understood in terms of ‘aesthetic consciousness’, then many phenomena of *marginal importance* to modern aesthetics become less problematical and, indeed, even move into the centre of an ‘aesthetic’ questioning that is not artificially truncated”<sup>56</sup>.

While Gadamer’s reference in those pages of *Truth and Method* was limited to the sphere of art, such a conception has the potential to account for extra-artistic aesthetic phenomena as well. Far from being an extrinsic and totally accessory phenomenon, the occasion characterises aesthetic experience in its essence: the occasion is what constitutes its uniqueness. Occasionality is an expression of the situatedness of art in the sense of the specific spatio-temporal condition that characterises the essence of a phenomenon or work. It is important indeed to emphasise that the recovery of the decorative arts occurs as a critique to the aesthetics of *Erlebnis*, for which “the actual work of art is what is outside all space and all time, the object of an aesthetic experience”<sup>57</sup>. In fact, it is precisely in relation to the exceptionalist criterion that Great art is the art of genius, while other aesthetic manifestations such as decorations were considered secondary: “The antithesis of the decorative to a real work of art is obviously based on the idea that the latter originates in ‘the inspiration of genius’. The argument was more or less that what is only decorative is not the art of genius but mere craftsmanship”<sup>58</sup>. For this reason, these elements were not considered to be eligible for the “uniqueness of the work of art”<sup>59</sup>.

This is not to be understood as a merely historiographical reappraisal of the biographical circumstances that gave rise to that work, an aspect Gadamer attributed instead to the way historical consciousness proceeds<sup>60</sup>. He himself emphasised that, although blurred, the distinction

<sup>55</sup> “An ornament, a decoration, a piece of sculpture set up in a chosen place are representative in the same sense that, say, the church where they are found is itself representative [TM 159]”. In this context, one can also understand the reappraisal of the centrality of architecture, which combines the functional aspect with the artistic element.

<sup>56</sup> TM 144

<sup>57</sup> TM 158

<sup>58</sup> TM 158

<sup>59</sup> TM 158

<sup>60</sup> See H.-G. Gadamer, *Who Am I and Who Are You?*, in “*Who Am I and Who Are You?*” and *Other Essays*, ed. by R. Heinemann, B. Krajewski, SUNY Press, New York 1997, pp.

between these two attitudes is nevertheless fundamental: “The historian will seek out every element that can tell him something of the past, even if it counters the work’s claim to meaning. He will examine works of art in order to discover the models: that is, the connections with their own age that are woven into them, even if they remained invisible to contemporary observers and are not important for the meaning of the whole. This is not occasionality in the sense intended here”<sup>61</sup>.

In contrast, occasion indicates precisely the moment that enacts the work: “To be occasional is essential to it: the occasion of the performance makes it speak and brings out what is in it”<sup>62</sup>. From this point of view, the occasion enables the work of art to constitute itself as such, and must not therefore be viewed as something accessory, but, on the contrary, as the aspect that is at the source of the work of art and its presentation: “With respect to the element of occasionality, these phenomena represent particular cases of a general relationship that obtains for the being of the work of art: namely that it experiences a continued determination of its meaning from the ‘occasion’ of its coming-to-presentation”<sup>63</sup>.

If, according to Gadamer, this aspect emerges especially for the reproductive arts, it actually underlies every work. This principle can therefore be extended to extra-artistic aesthetic phenomena, i.e. as “the director who stages the play displays his skill in being able to make use of the occasion”<sup>64</sup>, and likewise in ordinary aesthetic experiences we must also seize the occasion that allows us to see an ordinary object or activity in an aesthetic light, as in the case of drinking our everyday coffee, that, in a certain circumstance, can become an aesthetic experience.

The occasion, however, does not represent the exceptionality reserved only for certain experiences, but rather the possibility of focusing attention on a phenomenon that would otherwise be mere routine: for example, setting the table, from a mere daily task, can become an aesthetic experience involving our senses and our emotions on a given convivial occasion. Moreover, the fact that we speak of occasion does not imply a relativistic perspective characterised by a set of merely subjective and disconnected experiences. It is precisely the occasion, which gives meaning to repetition, that shows the shareability of the aesthetic experience, as Gadamer affirmed in relation to occasional arts: “The uniqueness of an element occasional in this narrower sense is fulfilled in a work of art, but is fulfilled in such a way that through the being of the work this

67-165: pp. 149-153.

<sup>61</sup> TM 146

<sup>62</sup> TM 147

<sup>63</sup> TM 147

<sup>64</sup> TM 147

uniqueness comes to participate in a universality that makes it capable of yet further fulfilment. Thus the work's unique relation to the occasion can never be finally determined, but though indeterminable this relation remains present and effective in the work itself"<sup>65</sup>.

Thus, the occasion can also be considered to underlie the aesthetic phenomena, making a distinction between mere routine and our paying attention to a certain phenomenon. For example, as already mentioned, the act of setting the table can take on an aesthetic connotation on a given occasion and make us pay attention to details that we would not have noticed otherwise. As in the case of repetition, the occasion does not imply emphasising some exceptional aspect limited to Great art; but, on the contrary, it aims at reappraising the aesthetic aspects that have been overshadowed by the consideration of genius-based aesthetics. However, it also makes it possible to distinguish a mere repetition of non-aesthetic moments from moments characterised by the fact that an aesthetic experience is taking place, which can be participated in.

It is precisely the dynamic between repetition and occasion that reveals an anti-exceptionalist criterion that can account for the continuity between artistic and everyday aesthetic phenomena. Furthermore, it should be noted that the reference to repetition, mainly developed in the case of the festival, has a democratic bearing in Gadamer: the festival is for everyone, i.e. it does create participation and a horizontal relationship between individuals, who are brought together precisely by taking part in such an event. Likewise, *Everyday Aesthetics* certainly does not aim at upgrading the secondary aspects in a merely accessory sense, with the risk of falling back into an *art pour l'art* reading of the everyday phenomena, i.e. an aesthetisation of everyday life<sup>66</sup>. It is precisely the expansive approach of *Everyday Aesthetics* that seems to be capable of avoiding such risk, by leveraging the occasion as a moment that allows one to grasp the extraordinary in the ordinary, an extraordinary that is however also accessible to the masses, traditionally excluded from events of art in the contemporary world – a case in point is avant-garde, a phenomenon which is now increasingly limited to a few connoisseurs.

The mutual dynamic of repetition and occasion shows a movement that characterises aesthetic ordinary experiences that become extraordinary, such as tasting a food on a certain social occasion and grasping its aesthetic aspects. This does not imply a reduction to the subjective moment, i.e. solely to the experiencer's perception, but it is always a re-

<sup>65</sup> TM 148

<sup>66</sup> For a reflection on *Everyday Aesthetics* and aesthetisation, see G. Matteucci, *Everyday Aesthetics and Aestheticization. Reflectivity in Perception*, in "Studi di Estetica" 45, 1, 2017, pp. 207-227.

lational aspect, which imbues the experience between those taking part in it. As a promising direction for future research, Gadamer's aesthetic reflections could be fruitfully reassessed and contribute to *Everyday Aesthetics* towards a social and situated aesthetic experience.

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### **Between Repetition and Occasion. A Gadamerian Contribution to Everyday Aesthetics**

In this paper I aim to focus on a possible contribution of Gadamer's aesthetics in the line of inquiries of *Everyday Aesthetics*, stressing the continuistic and anti-exceptionalist perspective at the core of Gadamerian philosophy. I will show how it is possible to highlight the continuity between artistic experience and everyday life in the critique of "aesthetic differentiation", in order to explain how Gadamer could contribute to the so called "expansive" approach of *Everyday Aesthetics*. In particular, I will tackle the concepts of repetition and occasion. The former manifests the characteristic proper to every form of art, namely being iterable in a way that does not contradict its uniqueness. The concept of occasion draws attention on the specificity of every aesthetic experience, manifesting its "extraordinary" character within ordinary life.

KEYWORDS: Gadamer, Hermeneutics, Everyday Aesthetics, repetition, occasion.