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Foreword

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Foreword

*Ossi Naukkarinen
and Arto Haapala*

Toute notre vie n'est qu'action: toute la société n'est qu'un mouvement continu de personnes, qui se remuent pour quelque fin.

Charles Batteux, 1746

"Aesthetics and Mobility" is the topic of this first special volume of *Contemporary Aesthetics*. As its title reveals, the volume deals with questions of aesthetics in the context of mobility, i.e. in connection with traffic, mobile information technology, tourism, sports, arts involving or thematizing movement and other mobile phenomena, many of which play a crucial role in the contemporary world.

In fact, some social scientists judge the role of mobile phenomena to be so important that they tend to see today's Western culture in its entirety as a culture of mobility, and many non-Western cultures seem to reflect the same trend. This entails, for example, that when analyzing contemporary societies and their activities, the focus should be on flows, fluids and currents of people, objects, images, information, capital and waste, and not so much on geographical areas, stable structures or classes, as has traditionally been the case. The reason, put briefly, is that such fluids and flows can be argued to organize and affect people's lives more profoundly than formerly. This shift of focus also changes the whole idea of society and the nature of the social sciences.

It is plain to see that traffic and other modes of mobility affect our lives in many ways and that their volume is increasing all the time. More people, objects and information move faster, more often and farther than ever before. For example, it has been estimated that in 2005 there are about 700 million cars and 800 million Internet accesses in the world, whereas there were only some 50 million cars and not a single Internet access in 1950. This has made moving both people and information much easier and faster, and the numbers are still growing. Everyone understands that this development has radically changed the world we live in and that the change has a strong impact on our lives. But what these effects actually are, as well as where, when and on whom, is an interesting and many-faceted set of questions that currently occupies many social scientists.

Some others say, however, and we believe that readers of this journal will tend to agree, that not only mobility but also aesthetic phenomena such as art, beauty, sensuousness and aesthetic experiences have a very important role in our lives. And indeed some philosophers and social scientists see the role of these factors as being so important right now that they tend to see all (Western) culture today as aestheticized culture. According to such lines of thinking, people use aesthetics as a tool or basic principle in their lives for orienting themselves. Some see this as an epistemological issue, some as ethical, some as economic - the variations are many. Such ideas have been actively elaborated in German discussions by such writers as Wolfgang Iser and Gerhard Schulze. In

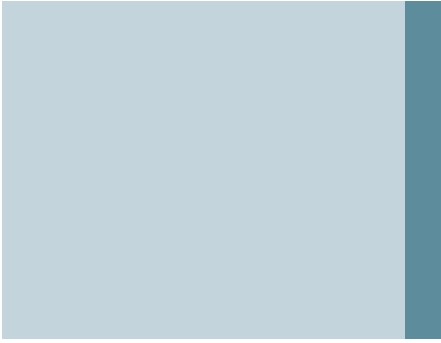
France, the writings of Luc Ferry and the late Michel Foucault, among others, are relevant. In the English-speaking world, the importance of aesthetics for consumer culture has been emphasized by Mike Featherstone, and the impact of the so-called creative class on the economy has been discussed by Richard Florida.

Both generalizations must be seen as grossly exaggerated, however, if they are understood as claiming that either mobility or aesthetics is *the* most important single feature of our cultures. But they refer to noteworthy phenomena; both mobility and aesthetics play an important role in the contemporary Western world, and thus they call for penetrating analyses from many angles. Of course, both areas have been studied actively for quite some time now and from many points of view. Even if they can be seen as especially important today, mobile and aesthetic phenomena and the study of them have long histories. But what is important here is that they have not often been studied together, as intertwined. The idea of this publication, however, is exactly that: to put these two points of view together and to see how mobility affects our aesthetic conceptions and behavior, and further, how these shape the mobility culture. The articles that appear in this issue offer an overview of what an aesthetics of mobility means.

We believe that it is not too bold to say that this special issue of *Contemporary Aesthetics* is timely and that it fills, or at least starts to fill, an obvious gap. As far as we know, few attempts have been made to analyze the whole area of mobile aesthetics in some depth, although individual writers have offered interesting insights into the theme, and the philosophy and history of dance have covered some aspects of the topic as well. Some of the following articles deal with these insights, and they also complement them with new accounts and impulses. The whole, we hope, will provide useful (philosophical) tools for making sense of this complex but intriguing field.

The articles presented in this issue are based on presentations given at the conference, *Aesthetics and Mobility*, held in Helsinki, Finland, on 13-15 January 2005. This event was organized as a joint project of two universities and two research projects. These universities are the University of Helsinki and the University of Art and Design Helsinki, and the three-year research projects (2003-2005) are entitled *Aesthetics, Mobility, and Change* (funded by the Academy of Finland as a project SA 201402) and *Environment, Experience, and Mobility* (funded by the Emil Aaltonen Foundation).

We want to thank these institutions for making the conference and this publication possible. We also wish to thank the participants of the conference and the members of the research groups for their contribution to the success of this project. Above all, we are grateful to the editors of *Contemporary Aesthetics*, and especially to Arnold Berleant, for kindly providing the opportunity to present selected conference papers in this on-line journal. We think that this publication exemplifies the mobility of information and that, in keeping with title of the journal, the texts in this special volume address contemporary and aesthetically interesting



issues.

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Guest Editors