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A Conceptual Framework for the Aesthetics of Everyday Object Appreciation

Russell Quacchia

Abstract

This essay takes up the topic of the aesthetics of everyday object experience. In doing so, it strings together a series of fairly complex topics as a conceptual framework. Its focus is upon the nature of certain core features that appear to be at work in giving rise to this kind of experience. It especially considers the role of such features as the aura property of phenomenal objects and the self-activation of aesthetic-interested attention. It gives a level of explanation to the crucial topic of why we tend to ignore taking an active interest in the aesthetic dimension of everyday objects. It also examines how we come to identify ordinary phenomena in contrast to extraordinary phenomena. Finally, certain issues surrounding the prospects for conceptually delimiting the scope of the field are considered.

Key Words

aesthetic, an experience, appreciation, aura, dullness, encounter, everyday, extraordinary, neutralizing effect, ordinary, phenomenal object, self-activated interest, sensory presentations

1. Some preliminary matters of understanding

The individual subjects to be covered in developing this conceptual framework are, of course, difficult. So let's first consider the nature of the aesthetic itself since it represents the overall context of our topic.^[1] The term 'aesthetic,' in relationship to sensory experience, has four basic aspects. It has an *epistemic* aspect and a *cognitive* aspect involving sensorial presentations to us as sentient-sapient subjects, in having an experience. It has an *axiological* aspect and an *affective* aspect involving the appreciation of such presentations by us as cognizing subjects in having that experience. The first two aspects represent the stimulus side, and the latter two aspects represent the response side of aesthetic experience.

The epistemic aspect of the term 'aesthetic' may be characterized to consist in the effective press of the conditions of a phenomenal object's being in a sentient subject's awareness, in the form of sensorial presentations at the time and place of the experiential occurrence. The aesthetic, in its epistemic aspect, has to do with how phenomena present themselves to us.^[2] The cognitive aspect is involved with the information presented *in* an experience. The affective aspect of the term 'aesthetic' consists in the spontaneously felt response in immediate connection with the object of an experience. The axiological aspect involves the appraisal of the value-significances found in having the experience.

These four aspects variously relate to and overlap each other, influencing the formation of our aesthetic appreciations. Such experience sets the stage for taking an aesthetically interested attention as it relates to a reflectively considered appreciation of its aesthetic worth.^[3] In this reflective standing back, we can distinctively come to appreciate that of which the experience is of in addition to the having of the experience itself *tout court*.^[4] In this essay, where required for clarity, aesthetic_E will represent the epistemic/cognitive aspects and aesthetic_A will represent the axiological/affective aspects of the use of the word.

We may next consider a feature basic to experience. Experience possesses the dual characteristic of being, in one sense, a continuum and, in another sense, discrete, in the differentiation sense of this latter term. In the continuum sense, our experiencing is an undifferentiated continuous flow. In the differentiated sense, we perceptually experience only a limited portion of what phenomena are available, in relatively discrete forms, coming to our sentient sensitivities. The continuum level of experience serves us as a background out of which discrete phenomena are or can be foregrounded as individually distinctive objects of perceptual awareness. It is the discrete aspect that permits distinguishing kinds of things. It is also where the distinctions of parts to whole and whole to context relations are revealed to our discriminative operations. It follows from the background/foreground distinction that the aesthetic, in the epistemic sense, is an ever-present background condition, a pervasive continuum of sensorial life. It is a condition upon which and out of which discrete phenomenal objects manifest themselves to us, in our experiencing them as the foreground of our focally concentrated attention. In this sense, the aesthetic_E is that by which we first come to be aware and know of sensory phenomenal objects. The aesthetic_E, then, is an inherent aspect of all sensorial experience. Aesthetic_E is that to which we apply aesthetic_A interest

attention on behalf of appreciating the value rewards afforded thereby. The epistemic condition of aesthetic experience is an unrestricted flow as to when, where, and what discrete objects present themselves to us in interacting with them.^[5]

Let's now examine the term 'ordinary.' 'Ordinary' has four basic senses interrelationally forming a temporal/spatial axis and an object/subject axis, each of which can cut across and condition each other, in its various uses. 'Ordinary,' in its *frequent* sense, and 'ordinary,' in its *distributed* sense, form the temporal/spatial axis in correlation with encountering conditions of experience. 'Ordinary,' in its *property* sense, and 'ordinary,' in its *attitude* sense, form the object/subject axis, correlating with the affective conditions of experience. The uses of the term 'ordinary' can be divided into several categories, each with quite different imports. These categories consist of four non-temporal uses, three temporal uses, and one either/or.^[6] However, two of the non-temporal category of uses of the term are especially noted here as they are most relevant to our discussion, in relation to the central role of aura to be introduced in the next section. These are:

1. the ordinary, in a non-temporal use applied in a cognitive-descriptive sense to the comparative status of collectively shared properties of objects as a class; and
2. the ordinary, in a non-temporal use applied in an affective-appraisal sense to the value status of objects.

In connection with the aura-capacity of phenomenal objects, the use of the term 'ordinary' has two basic modes: an objective mode referring to aura as a factual property of phenomena, and a subjective mode referring to a subject's attribution of qualitative status to an object of attention. It is at once an attribution taken by the subject stimulated by the phenomenal object itself in its mutually effective and reciprocal engagement. In other words, an experience is constituted simultaneously, on the one hand, by what the subject brings to the experiential occasion and, on the other, by what the phenomenal object brings to that engagement. The premise here is that the experiencing of self and the experienced object are simultaneously specified in the information available to perception, on the one hand, and one's memory, on the other hand, at the conscious level. This is termed, in cognitive psychology, the co-specification hypothesis.^[7]

Finally, consider the word 'everyday.' The term 'everyday' is a temporal-order term indicating the cycle of successive, repeated, or recurrent presentations to our awareness. In the context of our topic, 'everyday' suggests recognizing those phenomenal objects that are frequently but not necessarily literally encountered in everyday or daily life terms. In other words, it does not mean "all the time" but "more often than not" or "most of the time." Everyday frequency encounters can take two forms: the frequency of coming into contact with an object by virtue of routinely taking the same route, or the frequency of coming into contact with multiples of the same object existing distributively in various locations. It is often said, in the latter case, euphemistically, "some things are just everywhere." The term 'everywhere' is a distributive-order term indicating that which is found to be plentiful, abundant, or numerous. Every discrete phenomenal object must be somewhere, and multiples of the same phenomena are variously plentiful and variably spatially distributed, influencing the frequency of their encounter in daily life terms. The term 'everywhere,' in our context, is not taken literally. Telephone poles and trees, as abundant and widespread as they may be, are not, after all, literally everywhere. The words 'everywhere' and 'everyday' together suggest the relative prevalence in space and the relative pervasiveness through time of phenomenal objects.

We often use the term 'everyday' as a synonym for ordinary, indicating the frequency of encounter with phenomenal objects, specifically those objects that are taken to be ordinary in their status. However, the frequency level of experiences is an independent variable to any one object's makeup as ordinary. Everyday frequency experience is not necessarily the same as ordinary object experience. When the term 'everyday' is used as substitute for the term 'ordinary,' relative to the phenomenal object's qualitative status, it can also imply its adverbial form, 'ordinarily,' meaning "in the ordinary course of events." Additionally, it can suggest the object's commonplace state of being widespread in spatial distribution. This term's capacity to imply all these three senses is perhaps why we are drawn to employ it, in substituting fashion, where we readily associate the everyday with the ordinary as virtually the same thing.

As an example of ordinary or everyday experience, let us take that of the bicycle. Most of us would regard bicycles as ordinary objects. Concerning bicycles that are to be frequently encountered, the Flying Pigeon bike is, by far, the best example. There are over 500 million of them widely distributed, in various places in the world. On the other hand, there are very few Bowden Spacelander bikes in existence. So the prospect for encountering this particular bike is infrequent, if not outright rare, by comparison. Imagine the scene of a typical university

campus where bicycles are numerous and are usually distributed in abundance across the campus. In these situations, experiencing bicycles is an ordinary experience. This example is one where the term 'ordinary' is used in its frequency and distribution senses, in connection with encountering bicycles. It concerns, in emphasis, the temporal/spatial axis noted above representing the cognitive aspect of aesthetic_E experience of objects.

In the discussion that follows, the term 'object' will be used as a placeholder referring to that which is delivered to sensory awareness, that is, perceptually experienced. The term 'phenomenon' will be used as a placeholder referring to that which the experience is of and conditions it. Their combination as 'phenomenal object' is used as a placeholder referring at once to the ontological condition of the stimulus phenomena and the epistemic condition of the cognized object. The term 'object' inclusively covers entities, things, items, scenes, situations, events, processes, activities or practices.

2. The instrumental role of aura

Discrete phenomenal manifestations are presented to us as objects by means of their aura-capacity. Aura is an ontological feature of phenomenal objects in the form of a stimulus capacity having dual aspects: a cognitive aspect and an affective aspect.^[8] The cognitive aspect is an emanating circumambient quality of an object leading, within an experience, to its affective aspect of inducing a feeling, mood, or spirit. We can only come to know any one phenomena's affective aura force as it effectively emerges in an experiential occasion. They are experience dependent, limited by any phenomenon's aura-capacity, on the one hand, and, on the other, cognitively conditioned by our own sensitive and receptive capacity conditions at the time. The aura capacity of phenomenal objects, in their energy force aspect, is the overall effective press upon us operating in degrees ranging from an ordinary level of power intensity to an extraordinary level of power intensity.^[9] In other words, an aura's stimulus force can range from negligible to overpowering. The latter of these cases, that is, the extraordinary case, often induces the affect we call 'awe.'

In the overpowering type of aura cases, the discrete phenomenal object, in and of itself, tends to stand out from the background continuum of experience with little endeavor on our part. It is a case where the phenomenal object itself spontaneously grabs our aesthetic interest. An example would be driving along a highway at the ocean's edge and being motivated to stop to witness a gloriously dramatic sunset. Another case might be when an old friend suddenly loses a great deal of weight, going from endomorph to ectomorph in appearance. In affective terms, the person's sudden change of appearance may induce the feeling of awe as to the extraordinary change in how that person looks. However, the negligible aura-type cases, where the phenomenal object is of a relatively weak aura force, require that we, on our own, take up an active interest in the object.^[10] In the context of our topic, we specifically take up an *aesthetic_A* interest attention to the particular phenomenal object, in contrast to practical, moral, political, economic, religious, or historical interests. It is with the weaker level case of aura-capacity experience that the ordinary status of phenomenal objects is usually associated and where the word 'everyday' operates as its synonym. It is this type of case that involves an initiative on our part to take an *aesthetic_A* interest attention toward everyday or ordinary phenomenal objects.

3. The features and workings of everyday phenomenal object aesthetics

Sensorially presented phenomenal objects are characterized by and discoursed upon in terms of their form, content, and force. The qualities of a phenomenal object's makeup, relating to its form and content, range from simple to complex. Their energy level of force, as indicated in the prior section, ranges from negligible to overpowering. It is the level of force that correlates as the stimulus factor to attention getting. It is the characteristics of form and content that correlate as the stimulus factor to interest reward.

In relation to the affective sense of the aesthetic, the greater the inclusive complexity of the form and content, the richer it is, and the greater the potential for interest reward. Conversely, the less content represented by a form and the greater the simplicity of that form, the less potential there is for interest reward. In relation to the cognitive sense of the aesthetic, the greater the simplicity of form, the greater the ease of perceptually grasping that form, and the greater the complexity, the greater difficulty of apprehension. The distinction at work here is that simplicity and complexity conditions each influence the cognitive and affective senses of the aesthetic experience in different ways. In the affective sense case, complexity has to do with *what* is expressed. This is the case where the less value-significant content there is, the less prospect of reward. The cognitive sense case has to do with how that content is expressed. It is where the simplicity of form serves the ease of apprehension of the form itself and the grasp of its content. Regarding a

phenomenal object's aura force, the greater the level of force, the greater is its attention-getting potential; the less the energy level of aura force, the less potential for attention getting.

Of those phenomenal objects we encounter that we come to regard as ordinary, they are felt to have an aura energy force that tends toward the negligible level. It is also usually connected with a tendency toward relative simplicity or plainness in the object's formal composition. In our discourse on such objects, we often employ certain synonyms associated with this plainness characteristic, such as meager, ascetic, bareness, unassuming, prosaic, pedestrian, and nondescript. The plainness feature of ordinary objects contributes to their affective pallor of dullness. Dullness is a deadening or blunting effect on sensibility leading to apathy or disinterestedness. Examples might be dusting the household furniture, paying bills, pumping gas in one's car, or dealing with an unimaginative, shallow person who talks incessantly on one subject. Such a person we tag as being a dullard. In such dullness cases, we often apply certain matter-of-fact type synonyms, such as unlively, dreary, banal, stale, unexciting, cut-and-dried, insensible, unfeeling, and unpleasurable, just to cite a few. Adding the impact of the everyday-frequency level of encounter to such ordinary objects, we incur exposure to the affects of tedium and satiation.

In our discourse, when motivated by a felt tedium over such ordinary objects that we encounter with everyday frequency, we tend to apply synonyms such as sameness, unvaried, uneventful, monotonous, humdrum, boring, weariness, fatiguing, or tiresome. It is the frequency of everyday encounters, along with the relative widespread or abundance of an object, that breeds such a level of familiarity with an ordinary phenomenal object that we tend to lose interest. Interests readily require refreshment of newness or novelty and variation to sustain our attention. It is the spatially widespread presence of ordinary objects, especially those we encounter with everyday frequency, that has often come to be regarded and labeled as garden variety phenomena.

Experiencing the cognitive look of plainness and the affective feel of dullness of ordinary or everyday objects serves to generate certain dispositions on our part. The pallor of dullness emanating from plain objects, together with the pall of satiation given rise to by the fatiguing tedium of frequent encounters, can combine so as to induce a neutralizing effect. This neutralizing effect engenders indifference leading to neglect or disregard for taking an active interest in ordinary or everyday phenomenal objects in relation to their aesthetic dimension. The neutralizing effect works to reduce our sensitivity, and the indifference effect works to diminish our receptivity to the aesthetic interest perspective. The net effect of this indifference and neglect is that the aesthetic values of ordinary and everyday phenomenal objects, be they positive or negative in valence, tend to be overlooked and go unappreciated for the values they afford.^[11]

All of these characteristic affects serve to explain why we come to give so little attention to the aesthetic value dimensions of ordinary, phenomenal objects. If the characteristics of an ordinary or everyday phenomenal object is that it is overly simple so as to be cognitively plain and affectively dull, and if there is an indefinitely large number of them widely distributed everywhere, and if in everyday frequency one routinely comes into contact with them, then it is only if we take a self-activated aesthetic interest attention in them that we can come to penetrate to the value affordances that would otherwise be overlooked and go unappreciated. As Gianluca Consoli reports in cognitive psychology terms, in coming to our attitudes, our aesthetic interest may be activated in two different modes, "automatically and spontaneously or intentionally and deliberately."^[12] In the case of extraordinary objects, the aura level intensity commands our attention and our aesthetic interest, causally working from the world to mind. However, in the case of ordinary objects with low levels of aura presentation, this requires of our discretion to self-initiate the aesthetic interest, hence working from mind to the world. In this case, our coming to the appreciation of the aesthetic_A virtues of ordinary or everyday phenomenal objects is, simply put, up to us.

Let's return to our example of bicycles as they may be found and experienced on a university campus. Consider the case where a student approaches a concentrated mass of bicycles to retrieve his or her own. However, the student's attention is immediately drawn to focus on what is a Bowden Spacelander bike parked among them all. The Spacelander bike is so unusual in its compelling appearance that the student's interest in finding his or her own bike is involuntarily usurped. The student is captivated by this bike's extraordinarily unique design. Contextually, the bike simply stands out with overpowering aura force as an extraordinary object. The student's Aesthetic_A experience, in this case, is compellingly driven by the aura of the aesthetic_E properties of the bicycle itself. This example involves, in emphasis, the object/subject axis noted earlier in connection with the affective aspect of experience.

It is to be noted how often in our discourses on the subjects of the

ordinary and the everyday that we use the terms 'usual,' 'usualness' or 'usually.' 'Usual' refers to normative states, in the sense of conformance to a rule where we apply such synonyms as ordinarily, commonly, generally, or prevalently as descriptive in matters of fact. It is also used to refer to normative processes where we apply such synonyms as regularly, customarily, habitually, or conventionally as descriptive in matters of course. We use the term rather across the board to mean usual qualities, usual place, usual time, and usual disposition. These collectively refer to the what, where, when, and how of things. The word 'usual,' in this way, serves as a kind of lynchpin term applied widely across the modes of the ordinary and the everyday. In contrast, we call extraordinary phenomena and experiences unusual.

Encountering ordinary or extraordinary phenomena as objects of our experience is dependent upon personal lifestyle and circumstances. For example, a person incarcerated in jail, with its high degree of daily regimentation and enclosed quarters of experience, is to be contrasted with someone who is an international marketing professional, whose daily traveling from place to place around the world affords different opportunities of everyday experiencing relative to the range of phenomenal objects that are available. A park ranger stationed in Yosemite National Park is, on an everyday basis, routinely experiencing an extraordinary phenomenon, the scene of one of the aesthetic wonders of the world. In this circumstance, the phenomenal object remains extraordinary, in its qualitative state but, despite its compelling power, the ranger, apart from the practical responsibilities of work, may well subjectively suffer a loss of aesthetic interest due to the everyday exposure to and familiarity with the scene, such that satiation and fatigue sets in and neutralizes his or her interest leading to indifference and neglect. Such is the case where everyday repetitive frequency, as the saying goes, dulls the senses.

Conversely, take an example similar to one that Thomas Leddy once offered. Consider a professor who, for some years, on a daily routine basis, in early morning, walks along a certain path to his or her office building. One day the professor looks down and takes notice, with aesthetic interest, intrigued by the finely fitted and neat basket-weave-patterned layout of the path's brick paving. He or she also notices the complementary harmony of the rust-red color tone of the brick paving in relation to the contiguous yellow-green of the dew covered grass of the glade through which the path takes its course. The professor finds the overall experience pleasing. He or she may well find this experience not only pleasant but moving toward the extraordinary end of the spectrum, despite the ordinariness of the artificial and natural phenomena presented. Such an experience is engendered through self-activated interest-taking and the phenomenal conditions that are the object of his or her notice. The occasions in which we take a self-initiated interest specifically in the aesthetic dimension of an ordinary phenomenal object are rather idiosyncratic. In the course of the needs, issues, and concerns that arise in our daily lives, such occasions are not activated in any systematic way. They tend to occur in an *ad hoc* fashion. There are cases where we might do so at someone else's invitation or instigation.

4. The role of self-activation of aesthetic-interested attention to the ordinary

The crucial question of why we do not take a greater, specifically aesthetic interest in ordinary phenomenal objects has been given a level of explanation in the previous sections. In them, I suggested two basic reasons for our tendency to neglect taking an active interest in the aesthetic dimension of ordinary or everyday phenomenal objects. The first is that, in the course of our daily lives, there is the competition between the aesthetic_A interest and other interests, some of which are quite demanding of our attention. The second is attributed to the neutralizing effect engendered by ordinary objects and everyday experience leading to interest neglect. It is for these two reasons that it can be said that our taking an aesthetic interest in the ordinary is not ordinary.

Given the compelling or overpowering nature of the aura force of extraordinary phenomenal objects to garner our attention, how can or do we take an aesthetic interest in ordinary or everyday phenomenal objects of lesser aura force that do not readily and spontaneously attract our attention? It appears that we can do so, as already suggested, only by standing back from other interests and electively take up, with intentionally directed attention, a concentrated interest in how things look, sound, smell, feel, or taste for their aesthetic value significances. It is in this way that we can counter the tendency toward indifference and neglect of the aesthetic attributes and virtues that may be present in ordinary phenomenal objects.

We can also balance the overt pressure of attending just to practical interests. For example, the activity of eating is usually a routine daily affair undertaken for the practical purpose of nourishing ourselves. In doing so, we may revert from this interest to attend with aesthetic interest to the tasteful or distasteful qualities of the food. How often do

we arrive at the food table with stomach growling because of appetite and, upon one mouthful, exclaim, "Ah! Does this taste good!" It is to be granted that if one were quite literally starving to death, presumptively an extraordinary case, such a circumstance might well defeat one from taking up out of one's discretion such an aesthetic interest.

Let us return to the example of our university student, who also happens to be an ardent competition cyclist. His or her racing bike is a Raleigh, while those of the competitors range from an Arrow, a DeBacco, Pinarello Gan, and Jamis to a Cannondale. One day, out for a training exercise as a group, they are resting along the roadside and, for the first time, our student finds him- or herself comparing the appearances of each of the different bikes in aesthetic terms, admiring different features of design. In doing so, our student has self-activated an aesthetic interest attention in how these bikes look and feel, appreciating the overall aura of their qualities. It is this kind of example that shows the role of the self-activation of aesthetic-interest attention to everyday objects that permits and affords appreciation of their value significances that otherwise may be overlooked and go unappreciated in the course of daily life experiences.

5. Delineating the field of ordinary phenomenal object aesthetics

What is the basis for the division of the extraordinary and ordinary categories? What constitutes the field of ordinary phenomenal object aesthetics? The basis for the division between extraordinary and ordinary phenomenal objects depends on the distinctive level of the aura force, form, and content discussed in Sections 2 and 3. The relative difference in the aura of phenomena is the basis of the differentiation between the extraordinary and the ordinary. The extraordinary case is the superlative case; it is the consummate case, in the sense of being outstanding, compelling, overtly noticeable, strikingly notable and unusual, exceptional, uncommon, and rare. The extraordinary cannot have a less than exceptional aura without becoming ordinary. It can be inferred that that which is ordinary is potentially extraordinary. These two points together indicate that there is a certain asymmetrical relationship between the two, one that provides a clue to our ability to recognize and assign certain objects these statuses. So the question, again, is how do we sense, that is, recognize something ordinary and distinguish it from something extraordinary? What is the operational basis for our doing so?

Extraordinary phenomena and extraordinary experiences are exceptional in aura force and character, and relatively rare in spatial distribution and temporal frequency. By far, most experiences of phenomenal objects do not compellingly strike us in their sensory manifestations to be extraordinary, especially those that induce the experience of awe and wonder. Those phenomenal objects that we come to regard as ordinary are recognized on the basis of the experiential absence of the extraordinary affect. If so, the distinguishing ground for the recognition of the ordinary is a default condition of not being extraordinary in force and character. Ordinary phenomenal objects, as a status category of objects, are those in our experiences that we find by subtraction, that is, those objects not found in experience to be extraordinary in compelling aura force and character. If it is not experienced in aesthetic_A affect as extraordinary, what remains must be ordinary. Such ordinary phenomenal objects are affectively aesthetically_E non-compelling, requiring self-initiated aesthetic_A interest in order to be appreciated in that way.

When we express a judgment of aesthetic_A value upon a phenomenal object, we are expressing not only an interest in but also an attitude toward it. In doing so, there is often an ambiguity as whether or not we are valuing the object itself, or the experience itself, or both. In the extraordinary object case, it is more about what the phenomenal object's aesthetic_E aura brings to the experiential occasion, in contrast with the ordinary object case, where it is more about what the percipient subject brings to the experiential occasion in relation to self-activated interest and consequent attitude. In relation to this ambiguity, the question is often put forth in the form: "Is the status of the ordinary determined objectively by certain unique properties of phenomenal objects or do our own interests and attitudes determine the ordinary as a special subjective form of experience?"

The objective side of the issue turns on how the reference to property is understood. Property understood as a condition of the phenomenal object of cognition necessarily involves the percipient in mutual engagement with that stimulus in the form of a reciprocal influence. Any sensory phenomenon presents itself as an object in an experience by which it is cognitively and affectively known and recognized as being either ordinary or extraordinary in status. On this point, Thomas Leddy, in his article, "The Nature of Everyday Aesthetics," has it right. He advances "that [the term] 'property' not be [simply] understood in an objectivist way. The properties appreciated in everyday aesthetics are neither wholly objective nor wholly subjective. They are properties of experienced things, not of physical objects abstracted from our

experienced world."^[13] The sentient properties of phenomena are known within experiencing them as objects of awareness.

6. The Identification of ordinary and extraordinary phenomenal objects

In general, in order to sort things out and manage the vast array of phenomena presented to us in experiences, we conceptually collect discrete phenomenal objects together, assigning them under categories of type, kinds, or classes. We rather successfully do so, for example, in the case of the kind flowers. As evidenced in garden books, there is a rather consistent and settled listing of all those phenomenal specimens that qualify for the category, along with photo illustrations and texts descriptive of properties. In this particular case, there are certain readily identifiable shared standard properties constituting the spectrum of the category to be relied upon and cited with confidence. We are inclined to sort our experiences into the categories of the ordinary and the extraordinary. However, we are also inclined to seek identifying a spectrum of those phenomenal things of the sensory world that are ordinary, in contrast to the extraordinary. In doing so, we shift from a focus on the difference between the categories of the ordinary and the extraordinary as distinctive kinds to that of identifying the spectrum of phenomena deemed qualified to be located within each of these categorical kinds. A spectrum consists of three basic features: an uninterrupted *continuity*, representing its consecutive order; an open or closed *range*, representing its collective order; and a differentiated *variegation*, representing its distributive order. So a spectrum has a continuum characteristic, a scope characteristic, and a discrete individuation characteristic.

The attempt to identify a spectrum of individual phenomena within the category of the ordinary presents a set of difficulties not found in that of the category case of flowers. In this context, the terms 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' are used to refer to an object's property, not the frequency of encounter. In relation to the variegation or individuation factor of the spectrum within each of the extraordinary and ordinary kinds, the force-referring aura terms, such as 'strong' and 'weak', 'compelling' and 'negligible,' along with the form-referring terms of 'complex' and 'simple,' 'rich' and 'plain,' are all terms of degrees. Consequently, any one individually discrete phenomenon may ontologically possess these aura properties in a gradient, that is, a more-or-less proportional fashion. Given the case that the aura properties of any individual phenomena obtain in degrees, there is no definite fixed location available on the gradient scale of the continuum presenting a threshold cutoff line by which to clearly identify which discrete phenomena, in their actual makeup, qualifies them to be included or excluded within the ordinary category spectrum.

Other difficulties may be recognized in relation to any attempt at pre-identifying what objects are to be ruled in or out of the spectrum of the ordinary kind category. Ordinary phenomena can be constituent components contributing to the composition of an extraordinary phenomenal object, and extraordinary phenomena may be embedded in ordinary phenomena. An example of the earlier case is that ordinary trees are ordinarily plentiful to the landscape at large; however, they serve to contribute, by their presence, to the aesthetically extraordinary site of Yosemite Valley. An example of the latter case is a diamond found in ordinary stone having extraordinary aesthetic qualities. Another factor is that the ontological state of phenomenal objects is subject to change affecting their extraordinary or ordinary status over time. For example, the Great Barrier Reef, one of the wonders of the world, in current status, is subject to deterioration and diminishment and perhaps extinction with the onset of global warming conditions.

A further difficulty arises in connection with the range or scope factor of the spectrum. Any number of phenomena can be or dynamically become either extraordinary or ordinary such that the categories are indefinitely open-ended in relation to what things are included within the category. All of these points confirm that our abilities for recognizing that which is extraordinary and that which is ordinary as phenomenal objects is not, in a subjective way, intuitively obvious, and neither, in an objective way, is it empirically evident. It appears that there is no conceptual or descriptive precision to be had in regard to pre-establishing, apart from the actual having of an experience, what constitutes inclusion in the spectrum of ordinary phenomenal objects. The spectrum of discrete phenomena is open ended as a category, not closed in range. The ordinary, as a category, is not one that can be precisely circumscribed. Given the indicated difficulties, it seems that we rely on our immediate experience for taking the specific measure of the aura property of any one phenomenal object that would place it within the spectrum of ordinary in categorical status.

We do, in fact, have cognitive experiences of ordinary and extraordinary objects giving rise to affectively ordinary and extraordinary valuable experiences. It is the case with ordinary phenomenal objects that, on the basis of our discretionary activation of an interest, any such phenomena

can become an object of aesthetic_A consideration and appreciation. By doing so, we set up the experience to that extent, allowing the phenomenal object's aesthetic_E qualities be recognized for its aesthetic_A rewards. In these cases, the self-activation of an aesthetic interest works to orient and open our receptivity to take in and be moved by the aesthetic dimension of ordinary objects. If all this is so, taking an aesthetically_A active interest in the aesthetic_E of ordinary and everyday objects is a matter of personal discretion.

Taking an aesthetic interest in everyday ordinary objects is subject to one's personal sensitivity, receptivity, and predisposing inclinations, along with being dependent upon one's personal lifestyle conditioned by one's cultural and locational circumstances. The aesthetic_A attitude or value disposition arrived at is derived from the attention and interest one takes. These are the conditions brought to the experiential occasion by the subject. On the other hand, such an experience is dependent upon the objective condition as to the state of the aura's form and force that a particular phenomenal object brings to the occasion. These two conditions meet and are encapsulated in the moment of an experience. In the end, the distinctive threshold point of recognition as to what is the extraordinary case or the ordinary case can only be determined in an individual case of immediately occurring experiences where the ordinary is recognized by default of not being compellingly extraordinary. These classificatory assignment operations, supplemented with initiating an aesthetic interest, is at the basis of forming the experiences of the ordinary everyday objects.

If so, then the debate over which phenomenal objects are ordinary prior to their being experienced is a red herring. This appears also to be the case for everyday encounters. The everyday frequency of experiential encounters cannot serve to identify the aura state of any individual phenomenal object's being ordinary. Additionally, appealing to everyday frequency cannot lead to precisely establishing a delimited range of phenomena to categorize as ordinary. Such discussions over the restrictive or expansiveness of objects that are to be included under the notion of the everyday is categorically indeterminate.^[14] The cited case of the ranger in Yosemite Park allows that even the extraordinary can be an everyday experience. If anything, a high-level frequency of everyday encounters, for the most part, tends to work against our taking an active interest in the aesthetic_E qualities of ordinary phenomenal objects and their appreciation.

Relative to ordinary phenomena, there is, in general, *no a priori* limit to what can become the object of aesthetically interested experience. The only limiting factor on the ordinary experience is the extraordinary experience of extraordinary phenomena. Jerome Stolnitz claimed in his article, "The Aesthetic Attitude", that "any object at all can be apprehended aesthetically," adding "the aesthetic attitude can be adopted toward "any object of awareness what ever."^[15] And, Paul Ziff, in his article, "Anything Viewed," contended "anything that can be viewed is a fit object for aesthetic attention."^[16] Marshall Cohen, in his article, "Aesthetic Essence," goes so far as to remark that even "the experience of brushing one's teeth" can be an aesthetic experience if attended to with this interest.^[17] Sherri Irvin's remark that "our everyday lives have an aesthetic character that is thoroughgoing and available at every moment, should we choose to attend to it" leans toward the context of ordinary phenomenal objects.^[18]

It should be noted, in relation to Stolnitz's second quoted remark, that a case can be made that it is not the attitude that drives aesthetic attention but interest taking. Attitude, on the one hand, is taking a position, posture, or stance toward something, in the belief that it is of a certain constitutive makeup or value valence. Interest, on the other hand, is to become attentive to something, out of curiosity, in wanting to know or learn something about that thing. It is not attitude that determines the possible recognition of the aesthetic qualities of ordinary objects but the self-discretionary activation of the aesthetic interest as a perspective that directs the attention taken in ordinary and everyday objects. The attitudinal stance of the value-significance of a phenomenal object, be it positive or negative in final judgment, is a consequence of taking that interest.

7. Conclusion

Our topic has been that of aesthetic appreciation, with a focus on the ordinary phenomenal objects of experience, in contrast to the extraordinary. We have discussed the ordinary status and impression, for the most part, under the associated synonym, 'everyday.' Our experiential lives center around the value-significances afforded by the omnipresence of the aesthetic_E qualities presented to us by the phenomenal objects we encounter. We have treated the ordinary in its *frequency* sense, the ordinary in its *distributive* sense, the ordinary in its *property* sense, and the ordinary in its *attitude* sense. But arriving at one's attitudes, dispositions, opinions, or appreciations of ordinary phenomenal objects lies with our aesthetic perspective interest taking.

Our interest taking is tied to our sensitivity to and receptivity for taking an active interest in the diversity of aesthetic_A values afforded through aesthetic_E presentations. In the case of ordinary phenomenal objects, we deploy our aesthetic_A-interest directed attention in search of such positive values that may be available but unrecognized.[19] If aesthetic-interested attention is to be better understood and encouraged on behalf of the aesthetic qualities such ordinary objects offer, it would seem that it is entirely up to us to do so. We, on our own discretion, are faced with volunteering to move from indifference and neglect of the aesthetic_A interest to an actively interested concern over the ordinary or everyday phenomenal objects that are, after all, most of what is present in our daily lives. Transforming the ordinary experience into an extraordinary experience by self-activated interest in their aesthetic dimension may potentially dispel at least some of the dullness endemic of the ordinary.[20]

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Endnotes

[1] For a discussion of the question, "Is there such a subject as aesthetics?," see Roger Scruton, "In Search of the Aesthetic," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 47:3, (July 2007).

[2] On the significance of the term 'presentation' in relationship to aesthetic interests, see for example: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford Blackwell, 1966), especially at 5, paragraph 15. J. O. Urmson, "What makes a situation Aesthetic?," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 31, (1957), 75-92, especially Summary Item 5. Also, Roger Scruton, "A Bit of Help from Wittgenstein," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 51:3, (July 2011), 309-319.

[3] The somewhat awkward phrase "aesthetically interested" covers the two described self-activated and compelling ways of our cognitively coming to specifically attend to the aesthetic aspect of phenomenal objects. A *disinterested*-interest in the aesthetics of a phenomenal object is the case where the subject's interest is not influenced by considerations of personal advantage or born from any motive to do anything. It is the case, for example, where, given the subject's manner of cognitive interest, an immediately felt pleasure, joy, and satisfaction are given rise to by the mere presence and presentation of a beautiful phenomenal object.

[4] In connection with this point, see Roger Scruton's *In Search of the Aesthetic*, p. 246.

[5] In their article, "Aesthetic perception and its minimal content: a natural perspective," Ioannis Xenakis and Argyris Amellos see what they term "interactive affordances" with objects, the potential which enables us to enhance our environmental experiences. See, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5 (2014), 1038. The aesthetic_E is viewed as "emergent in perception," which, quoting John Dewey, "contains the promise of that delightful perception which is aesthetic experience," in the affective sense of the aesthetic.

[6] The indicated categories may be enumerated as follows:

1. Ordinary in a non-temporal use, applied in a cognitive-descriptive sense to the comparative status of collectively shared properties of objects as a class.
2. Ordinary in a non-temporal use, applied in an affective-appraisal sense to the value status of objects.
3. Ordinary in a non-temporal use, applied numerically to the population, abundance or plentiful-ness of an object.
4. Ordinary in a non-temporal use, applied to the quality of an experience.
5. Ordinary in a temporal use, applied to the frequency of contact with an object, that is, the object's frequency of being present to the experiencing subject.

6. Ordinary in a temporal use, applied to the frequency of a subject focally attending to an object or objects with a certain particular interest.

7. Ordinary in a temporal use, applied to the continuous flow of experience.

8. Ordinary in a temporal and/or non-temporal use, as a normatively ordinary conformity to a moral or non-moral rule or standard.

[7] See Richard Carlson, *Experienced Cognition* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1997.)

[8] For a more detailed treatment of aura, see the author's "Aura, Awe and Sublime," in *Contemporary Aesthetics*, Volume 14 (2016).

[9] The "effective press" of aura is that of the epistemic sense of the aesthetic as characterized in Section 1.

[10] That perceiving as a process, in relation to interest taking, is not something that simply happens to us but is something that we actively do; see Alva Noe, *Action in Perception*, (M.I.T. Press, 2004).

[11] It is in this respect that Thomas Leddy's phrase, "The extraordinary in the ordinary," takes its import. It implies that if we take up an aesthetic interest in ordinary everyday objects, we are establishing for ourselves an opportunity to discover qualities that we would otherwise not come to appreciate.

[12] See Gianluca Consoli, "A Cognitive Theory of Aesthetic Experience," in *Contemporary Aesthetics*, Volume 10, (2013), Section 2. As will be remarked upon at the end of this paper, it is not attitudes that are activated but interests.

[13] In *The aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith, (Columbia University Press, 2005), p.7.

[14] For such discussions, see, for example: Kevin Melchionne's "The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics," *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Vol.11, 2013); Ossi Naukkarinen's "What is 'Everyday' in Everyday Aesthetics," in *Contemporary Aesthetics*, (Vol. 11, 2013); and Thomas Leddy's, "Experience of Awe: An Expansive Approach to Everyday Aesthetics," in *Contemporary Aesthetics*, (Vol.13, 2015).

[15] Jerome Stolnitz, "The Aesthetic Attitude" in *Aesthetics: Introductory Readings*, ed. John Hospers (Free Press, 1969), pp.17-27, quote at p. 24.

[16] Paul Ziff, "Anything Viewed," in *Oxford Reader: Aesthetics*, eds. Susan L. Feagin & Patrick Maynard (Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 23-30.

[17] Marshall Cohen, "Aesthetic Essence," in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, eds. George Dickie, Richard J. Sclafani (St. Martin's Press, 1977), pp. 485-499, quote from p. 489

[18] Sherri Irvin, "The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 4:1 (January 2008), 8.

[19] This is not to say that we are not exposed to aesthetic disappointments in the outcome of the process, a subject to be treated in a separate essay.

[20] The author would like to express his gratitude to the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their very helpful comments, criticisms, and suggestions in preparing this paper for publication.