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## Summary of *The Existential Aesthetics of Things* by Petra Baďová

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Peter Žiak

Summary of *The Existential Aesthetics of Things* by Petra Baďová.

Petra Baďová: *Existenciálna estetika vecí* (Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2016). 132 pp.  
ISBN 978-80-558-1082-9

As a discipline, the field of research of aesthetics is far from being confined to only works of art or natural entities. One of the most interesting areas of its research („most interesting“ because aesthetics situate their borders within this area, as well as unused potential) are things - original functional subjects- and situations in which we encounter them. The scientific monograph by Petra Baďová *The Existential aesthetics of things* presents a significant benefit for domestic aesthetics (especially for research aimed at non-artistic phenomena).

Baďová's monograph is divided into three parts. The first part explores the medium of photography and uses an example of how two authors contemplate the meaning of photography and taking pictures, thereby creating a deeper angle than just the format of interpreted images. It balances side by side the works of Rineke Dijkstra's from the series *Beach Portraits* and the unearthed amateur photographs of an unknown artist depicting three figures on a beach during vacation. At first glance, the choice is surprising - on the one hand is a professional photographer while on the other is an amateur whose shots do not have any primary artistic ambitions. With regards to the phenomenon of which the author takes priority, it is not however, about incomparable works. The comparison is based on an exploration of immobility or immobilization as the most basic symptom of picture quality, and only then interprets the expressive quality of portraits and the formal aspects of images. Thus, it goes beyond a formal level of works and considers photography as a ritual, its parts perceiving the flow of time, and as an attempt to stop the materialization of memories.

The second part of the monograph is an interpretation of everyday things in life, such as buttons, old (forgotten) toys and worn-out shoes. Baďová is not interested in just the original function of the object (which can be lost through wear and tear), but mainly in the relationship that their owner creates for them. By way of connotative semiotics, she tries to grasp the meanings which things may acquire in the context of life (again with an emphasis on what is somehow existentially serious). Subsequently, on the platform of Heidegger's analysis of the materiality of things, she retreats further from the surface of consideration in practical-utilitarian intentions and reveals the basic and original connectedness of human's being-in-the-world and how they relate to things.

In the final chapter, the author reflects on the most abstract phenomenon, which is crossing the threshold of a door. She creates a theme that the threshold is not only a thing, but a crossover, that is, a situation over which it is intended to a significantly greater extent than how it usually is when crossing a threshold. In this section, Baďová does not leave much to be desired for those things which are daily, automated, disguised by veil of habit or re-usable.

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What connects these phenomena of diverse interpretations? In what sense does it concern an aesthetic phenomenon? First and foremost it emphasizes the actual experience of perceiving things - at the forefront is the recipient and his "alignment" which enables him to see in something banal, something which is vitally essential. The interpretations contained in Baďová's monograph are therefore largely subjectively perceived particular things and her writing quite understandably (and with respect to the subject of interest, perhaps necessarily) approaches the form of an essay. Nevertheless, the work succinctly describes the essence of aesthetic experience, which assumingly is distant from a purely utilitarian attitude towards the perceived object. Baďová's interpretation moves precisely in this plane, allowing her to consider seemingly uninteresting subjects as aesthetically important phenomena. A part of this schedule is also finding a language of interpretation. The author lucidly and sensitively (often very poetically) grasps subtle and slight connections to the border of communicativeness. It is therefore understandable that in many places of the interpretation, inspiration is looked for in Roland Barthes - because she arrives at the other side of that *punctum* (semiotically elusive element) and writes about what it inherently interferes in, although it may not be intermediary. Reading the text by Petra Baďová requires a certain effort; it is necessary to adapt to her optics and follow her intricate trajectory of thinking. It is also, of course, a way towards a new vision of reality.

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