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COMPARATIVE EVERYDAY AESTHETICS: EAST-WEST STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY LIVING. By Eva Kit Wah Man and Jeffrey Petts (Eds). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023. 296 pp.

Does beauty reside in that which is exceptional and must aesthetics concern itself only with what gets labelled as “art”? A recent edited volume identifies newer ways of experiencing beauty and practising aesthetic theory by drawing attention to everydayness as the space of the beautiful. Edited by Eva Kit Wah Man and Jeffrey Petts, *Comparative Everyday Aesthetics: East-West Studies in Contemporary Living* expands the breadth of philosophical engagement to everyday life and thus breaks the distinction between the exceptional and the banal. The result is not just insights into the loosening up of the category of pleasure but an enhancement of hope for and meaning of pleasure by general readers who may not be grounded in aesthetics as a discipline. In the examples shared in the individual chapters of the volume, beauty becomes an all-pervasive thing, present in every detail of life as it is lived.

The six sections in the book speak of different aspects of everydayness that deserve a rich engagement from people as well as scholars. These are aspects that make abstract concepts of art or beauty concrete as manifested in Daoist pursuits, nature, food and drinking, technology, and relationships. A very dazzling instance is that of tea. Tea, in itself, might be of interest to connoisseurs who can identify the different types of taste of various kinds. But what makes tea a subject of inquiry from the lens of everyday aesthetics is the set of details that emerge in comparisons between cultures as they drink tea. For the English, inventing handles for their tea cups was a necessity because they wanted to avoid contact with the hot surface of the cup. However, for the Chinese, who never saw the need for one, a handle would interfere with the intimacy a drinker would experience with the cup when drinking tea. Similarly, tea easily fit into the idea of English breakfast while for the Chinese, tea time is a separate hour because tea tasting for them was “the pinnacle of the art of living” (162). The Japanese bring a different twist to the practice of tea drinking: they have tea houses where it becomes a matter of performance. The two chapters on tea (one by Yanping Gao and another by Tanehisa Otabe) and the art of using chopsticks (Richard Shusterman) relate the sophistication of consuming food to the sophistication involved in the hermeneutics of food and pleasure.

The lens of comparison brings a lot of insights into concepts at hand. For instance, one realises that the difference between Eastern and Western aesthetics does not lie in the heavy critical theory import that the latter is anchored in; it also lies in the way the cultures make sense of beauty. For instance, for the Japanese, art is about ways to beautify life as a whole and because modern European art is about separating art from life, this art has been on decline. While that is a very provocative statement or comparison to make, it must be seen in the context of relative perception of art that the author of the concerned chapter seeks to make. Another instance of comparativism is the observation that Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism and Confucianism do not see the everyday in opposition to the exceptional or the artistic for according to them, that which is mundane is actually “endowed with greatness” (175) and needs to be embraced. In other words, the idea of everyday

aesthetics would come across as an ideal to live by. Similarly, the clubbing of “craft” with “art” in some contexts generally means giving due credit to rural artisans or makers of folk art. But the Zhuangzi story “Cutting up an Ox”, discussed by Jeffrey Petts, speaks of butchering as “a sacred dance” with its own “rhythm” and “timing” that does not require a plan but as “a felt consummatory moment of tasks successfully completed” (188). Skill, in other words, requires a freedom from distractions that liberate an artist within oneself, and is thus not very different from art that gets housed in galleries but is targeted at everyday consumption.

Like the subject of skill, the idea of cell phones might otherwise seem far removed from the domain of aesthetic appreciation. However, as Janet McCracken shows, cell phones need to be seen as sources of pleasure (rather than evil harbingers of addiction): their tiny form (with foldability as a recent rage that is also nostalgic throwback to an earlier era of cell phones), with evolving graphics, and their capacity to record our everyday lives and thereby “carry our personhood for us” makes them ideal for engagement as products of design aesthetics (201). They are a beautiful example of the idea of function follows form.

Every chapter in the book is better than the others in the way it brings forth the editors’ vision of putting together a collection that “contributes to that noble aim, the importance of living” (38) because the art versus non art conversation is about political and moral aims too. The most beautiful example of which is Emily Brady’s chapter on Cryosphere Aesthetics arguing that the crises of the cryosphere (the parts of earth formed by frozen water) with global warming need an environmental aesthetics that captures the loss the local communities feel intergenerationally with the melting away of ice, which has its own sensory qualities.

Carolyn Korsmeyer’s very personal chapter “Memory’s Kitchen: In Search of a Taste” relates to lived experiences across generations from a different angle. Korsmeyer talks about her attempts at baking kuchen, a sweet cake, that her grandmother knew best to bake. She has only half of the recipe and all her attempts at reconstructing that taste and the accompanying memory of herself as a young girl relishing it have failed. But the ethos behind resurrecting the recipe are not just subjective here. Her contemplations on the loss go beyond the personal. She writes, “If I fall, that word will lose its meaning, and its distinctive taste, scent, and capacity to deliver a simple and absorbing pleasure will be forgotten” (126). Her musings on the disconnect between one’s present self and memoirs of everyday things from one’s past are very evocative of the loss of something or the other that people experience as they get older.

There is a lot for many kinds of audiences in the book: an unjargoned fascination with beauty that will leave the general reader aroused to simpler things around them, a poetic quality of going beyond the surface for those interested in reading about art, and a disarming style of making high philosophy resonate with everydayness for scholars who might be looking for fresher angles to look at aesthetics.

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ANGER IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES. By Ritu-shree Sengupta and Shouvik N. Hore (Eds.). UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023. 203 pp.

Anger is hardly a new concept in the academia. It has been observed how male artists and scholars have, through the ages, wielded the power of their overflowing metaphorical pen, trying to sublimate the overwhelming beauty of nature or the chaos of the urban landscape, and by extension,