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**CULTURAL TOURISM:
AUTHENTICITY, ENGAGEMENT
AND THE EVERYDAY**

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Abstract

As renown, one main aim of everyday aesthetics is to widen the scope of traditional Western aesthetics beyond the realms of fine arts and nature, so as to uncover the aesthetic potential of the varied phenomena that constitute people's daily life. Tourism and traveling, however, have so far received comparatively little theoretical treatment in the everyday aesthetics literature. This paper attempts to make up for this lack by presenting tourism as a proper object of aesthetic research. Unearthing the aesthetic motivations that animate so-called cultural tourism, it shows that, while searching for 'authenticity' in the visited destination tourists remain trapped in their own, detached, 'tourist gaze'. In order to reconcile this contradiction, we appeal to the theoretical tools provided by everyday aesthetics. After discussing and discarding approaches based on defamiliarization and distancing, we exploit strategies that rely on the adoption of an engaged aesthetic attitude. We conclude by suggesting that the engagement paradigm turns the tourist gaze into a mindful and embodied relation to the visited environment or cultural habit, thereby offering the visitor a chance to appreciate the place's quotidian life while at the same time ensuring aesthetic fulfillment.

Keywords

Everyday Aesthetics; Cultural Tourism; Tourist gaze; Authenticity; Aesthetic Appreciation.

1. Introduction¹

Tourism is an ever-increasing phenomenon in the globalized world. Although it is undeniable that people travel for several different purposes and in very different ways, many tourist activities are closely related to both artistic and non-artistic aesthetic practices - think for example of the importance of cultural and natural heritage in choosing a travel destination, the interest of visitors in the aesthetics of the visited cities, and the growing importance of culinary tourism. However, while sociologists have been investigating tourist practices since at least the Sixties,² tourism has obtained so far only relatively scant attention on the part of philosophers of art and aestheticians, with few relevant exceptions.³ As a matter of fact, a systematic discussion on the subject in philosophical aesthetics is still lacking. This neglect is particularly surprising if one shifts the focus to the domain of everyday aesthetics. As renown, one main aim of everyday aesthetics is to widen the unduly limited scope of traditional Western aesthetics beyond the realms of fine arts and nature, so as to take into account the variety of phenomena that constitute people's daily life, meant as a complex sum of objects, events and practices. With this aim, scholars in the field have investigated an astonishing number of activities. Some examples include laundry, cooking and commuting; weather; fashion and clothing, design; vacuum cleaning; gardening, landscaping, architecture,

and design.⁴ With the relevant exception of Katya Mandoki,⁵ who included tourism among the “matrixes” that make up everyday reality, tourism, has received comparatively little theoretical treatment in the debate.⁶

Marrying insights from tourism studies with everyday aesthetics, in this paper we will focus on a specific type of tourism, so-called cultural tourism, understood as an aesthetic practice dealing primarily with the aesthetic appreciation of the visited places’ everyday life. The overall aim of this analysis is to show that tourism and travelling more generally can constitute a proper object of investigation for aesthetics. Everyday aesthetics, in particular, will prove to be a valuable means by which we can reassess our tourist practices.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we introduce cultural tourism as a controversial social practice and identify its two main aesthetic drives, namely the search for aesthetic pleasure and a quest for the authenticity of the toured place in its everyday aspects. In section 3, we suggest that these two aesthetic drives are mutually in conflict. While looking forward to experiencing firsthand the authentic daily life of the visited destinations, tourists are confined by their own tourist gaze to the role of detached aesthetic spectators. In sections 4 and 5, we discuss two alternative ways in which the aesthetic appreciation of the ordinary is assessed by scholars in everyday aesthetics and apply them to the case of cultural tourism. We contend that, unlike strategies based on aesthetic distancing, the adoption of an engaged aesthetic attitude may turn the tourist gaze into an embodied and mindful relationship to the visited environment, thereby offering the visitor a chance to appreciate the place’s quotidian life in a way that is ideally akin to that of the locals.

2. Cultural Tourism as an Aesthetic Practice

Tourism is a widespread and well-established phenomenon embracing a number of distinct cultural activities, social relations, and economic interests. In 2018, before the Covid19 pandemic brutally curtailed displacements, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals, accompanied by USD 1.7 trillion of export earnings generated by tourism.⁷ Based on what tourists gaze upon, it is possible to distinguish various categories of tourism.⁸ For example, when tourists are primarily motivated by an intent to see art in a place other than one’s usual residence, scholars talk about ‘art tourism’.⁹ Instead, touristic activities aimed at experiencing ordinary aspects of social life in unusual contexts are generally referred to as ‘cultural tourism’.¹⁰

Emerged during the Nineties as a significant portion of global tourism, cultural tourism had already been identified in the late 1970s and early 1980s by researchers and tourism managers as being specifically oriented towards the understanding of the destination’s culture.

According to the UNWTO, cultural tourism is defined precisely by tourists' essential motivation to "learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination". Such attractions or products consist not only of the "arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries" but also of "the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions,"¹¹ as they unfold in the daily routine of human environments other than one's own.

An umbrella term, cultural tourism includes all forms of leisure travelling aimed at discovering different cultures, as for instance attending traditional craftsmanship such as cigar making in Cuba, hand waving in the Philippines, or miniature painting in Iran. Other prominent instances of cultural tourism are the numerous guided tours that allow visitors to spend some time in rural areas, apparently isolated from urban, more developed centers such as Maasai villages in the heart of the African bush. Visitors are promised a chance to live the life of a Maasai person, meet with Maasai families, visit the village huts, "watch a bloodletting ceremony" and even "venture to a local school or clinic". The aim of the experience, the advertising brochures claim, is to be immersed in "the fascinating ancestry of these noble people".¹² Similar expectations also lead tourists in Paris to strive for sipping a *café noisette* at the outdoor tables of a café, walking along the shady *boulevards* of the first *arrondissement*, or buying a freshly baked *baguette* at the *boulangerie* - in short, to experience firsthand the quotidian life of the city and get as close as possible to what they expect to be the essence of its people and their habits.

While cultural tourism has attracted the attention of scholars due to its economic potential, it has also entered heated theoretical debates about cultural heritage, globalization, and cultural identities.¹³ Next to what are considered to be the benefits of cultural tourism, such as economic development, fostering of heritage conservation, and an overall improvement of communities' wellbeing,¹⁴ cultural tourism is held responsible for several problems among which gentrification and outmigration processes, competition among members of the communities over resources and space, the loss of authenticity and of the cultural diversity of tourist destinations, and their "museumification."¹⁵ Even more radically, cultural tourism is involved in processes of economic inequality and of cultural appropriation relating to its colonial legacy.¹⁶

In this contribution, we won't take into account any of these concerns directly. Rather, we will restrict our survey to investigating the motivations that underlie cultural tourism as a peculiar aesthetic practice. While rethinking the aesthetics of cultural tourism clearly does not solve problems caused by intense touristic exploitation, the shift towards a different aesthetic framework in tourist studies might help us cast new light on how tourists relate to the visited cultural environments.

2.1 The Search for Aesthetic Pleasure

Besides the many social, economic, and anthropological variables that characterize cultural tourism, one first motivation is undisputedly the fulfillment of generally pleasurable experiences.¹⁷ The type of expectations that animate cultural tourists, however, are not only relaxation, fun, recreation, entertainment, relief from fatigue or distraction. As studies testify, tourism in general and cultural tourism more specifically are often driven by aesthetic considerations, aimed at some forms of *aesthetic pleasure*.¹⁸

The aesthetic interest of the tourist has been notably analysed by British sociologist John Urry in his seminal examination of tourism as a social practice.¹⁹ Urry relies on Michel Foucault's concept of 'the gaze' in the history of medical institutions in order to describe the particular attitude adopted by tourists towards the environment, the objects, the people, and the events that they encounter during their travel. Urry calls this attitude the *tourist gaze*. The tourist gaze is for Urry not a natural nor a purely modern phenomenon, but one which has emerged under specific historical circumstances in Western bourgeois culture. In particular, Urry traces its roots back to earlier configurations of travel such as the 'Grand Tour'— the travel through the main European cities and places of cultural interest which was considered, from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, an essential part of the education of young people from upper-class families.²⁰ The tourist gaze, however, only fully formed as a result of the exponential growth of personal travel in the second part of the twentieth century.²¹

From a theoretical point of view, the tourist gaze can be described as a way of perceiving or relating to places that cuts them off from the 'real world' and emphasizes the exotic aspects of the tourist experience.²² According to Urry, casting a tourist gaze upon the visited place amounts to departing from one's own established routines and contrasting the new environment with the ordinary and familiar one. Enhanced by the physical distance of the visitor from her own home, the tourist gaze is, consistently, "constructed through difference" that is, through the distance separating everyday, familiar, and routinary situations and objects from what is seen as unfamiliar and extraordinary in the visited place.²³ The distance inherent to the tourist gaze entails indeed the objectification and aestheticization of what is observed. In this sense, the tourist gaze amounts to an attitude that allows the visitor to enjoy the look of the toured object for its own sake, devoid of practical implication, extraordinary, worth experiencing, and, much like art, worth preserving—at least in one's own memory. The role of tourists as detached aesthetic beholders is further attested by their usual need to crystallize the experience by means of pictures and videos: "People linger over [the tourist gaze] which is then normally visually objectified or captured through photographs, postcards, films, models and so on. These enable the gaze to be endlessly reproduced and recaptured."²⁴

As it has been noticed, Urry's tourist gaze can be located within a specific model of aesthetic appreciation,²⁵ the so-called model of aesthetic distance. Epitomized by Edward Bullough²⁶ through the concept of "psychic distance", the notion of aesthetic distancing leans on a philosophical tradition that echoes the Kantian notions of contemplation and disinterested delight. In this model, distance is what allows for the fundamental distinction between fully-fledged aesthetic experiences and experiences of what is merely agreeable. While the latter are conceived as entailing a "non-distanced pleasure" that affects the self directly and immediately, the emergence of aesthetic value is seen as impossible without the insertion of a certain distance. Detachment is therefore required for the experiencer to aesthetically appreciate the experienced object. Aesthetic experience is thus only possible when observers remain at a fixed and adequate distance from the object. According to many, such a model has been dominating traditional Western aesthetics since the Eighteenth Century, shaping our notion of aesthetic appreciation as grounded in "separation, isolation, contemplation, and distance."²⁷

2.2. The Search for Immersive Authenticity

Another compelling driving force relates more specifically to the qualities of what is encountered during the visit. While adopting the detached, aesthetic attitude characterizing the tourist gaze, tourists expect their experiences to lack those qualities explicitly intended for tourist satisfaction. As Todd remarks,²⁸ cultural tourism is indeed motivated by a desire to experience people and places "more or less unaffected by the various influences that govern the tourist's everyday reality". This corresponds to what he calls the "un-touristed". On the one hand, tourists strive to finally find themselves immersed in that special place they have only seen in postcards, movies, or in the glossy pages of travel magazines and catchy websites. On the other hand, though, they perceive it as crucial that this experience be a *firsthand* experience. They aim to be present in, interact with, and feel connected to the selected locale, so as to be able to seize its 'true', 'real', 'authentic' essence. Notably, this interest is not limited to contemporary people and cultures but rather overpasses time, crosses social classes, and embraces the routine of distant eras. Cultural tourists are therefore often fueled by a wish to travel back in time,²⁹ towards idyllic and untouched townscapes, where time moves slowly if at all.

The being real, unspoiled, true to itself of a place represents thus a key value when it comes to assessing a touristic experience.³⁰ This search for the un-touristed also manifests itself in the particular fascination of tourists with the 'lives of others.' According to Dean MacCannell, tourists desire to share in the 'real life' of the places visited, to get in with the natives, or at least to see how life "as it really is lived"³¹ is reflected in the appearance of those places. They long for insights in the intimate backstage everyday of the locals: "Being 'one of them', or at one with

‘them’ [...] to see behind the others’ mere performances, to perceive and accept the others for what they really are.”³²

To this extent, the ordinary life of the visited place only becomes the object of the tourist’s aesthetic experience as long as the observed routines, habits, and daily activities present themselves as genuine and, so to speak, indifferent to the curious gaze and wandering of the visitor. In short, cultural tourism, as a social practice, fundamentally amounts to a *quest for authenticity*, understood as an immersive experience in the real-life of a certain place.³³ Stressing the relevance of the notion of authenticity in the tourism discourse, MacCannell,³⁴ for example, has gone so far as to define tourism “a modern version of the universal human concern with the sacred.” The tourist, he argues, is a kind of contemporary pilgrim, seeking authenticity in other ‘times’ and other ‘places.’³⁵

An admittedly slippery notion when considering such items as culture, habits, and traditions, authenticity certainly plays a central role in tourism marketers’ strategies and deeply shapes tourists’ expectations. The whole rhetoric of tourism is based on claims to the authenticity of what is seen. In tourism advertising, for example, not only are we confronted with the classical motifs of ‘the *typical* medieval house’, ‘the *very* place where Napoleon slept’, ‘the *actual* pen used to sign the law’, ‘the *original* manuscript of the famous book’, ‘the *real* piece of the *true* city walls’, but also with common refrains about locations that are ‘off the beaten track’, ‘off the tourist circuit’, ‘unspoiled’, ‘patronized by the locals.’ In Jonathan Culler’s words,³⁶ “The distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic, the natural and the touristy, is a powerful semi-otic operator within tourism.”

3. The Dilemma of Cultural Tourism

In the previous section, we argued that tourists aim to draw aesthetic pleasure from observing how daily life and its routines enroll in the selected tourist destination. Importantly, they do so via the adoption of what we have called the ‘tourist gaze’, a special kind of aesthetic gaze that leads the subject to a process of aesthetic detachment, estrangement, or defamiliarization from what she observes. On the other hand, tourists also expect that what they see is true and genuine. They want to experience the everyday life of the place they are visiting as it really is—unspoiled, unaltered, *untouristed*. For this purpose, they direct their attention towards visible signs that can attest to its authenticity—plaques, signals, markings, and other devices that serve as symbols or representations of the site’s integrity.

Although being equally relevant to the tourist experience, these two aesthetic drives cannot be satisfied at once. When tourists gaze upon other people’s everyday life, they look for contexts and practices that are not standardly conceived to be appreciated aesthetically but are rather lived in or performed by the locals for functional purposes. Tourists visiting Maasai

villages, for example, aim to get as close as possible to the people's habits—or at least, to what they assume these must be. For this reason, they aspire to experience directly objects and activities that seem to them as bearing the 'marker of authenticity' of the true Maasai, such as grazing the flocks in the savannah or attending to the preparation of traditional meals. All these things, which are just practicalities for the village inhabitants, are contemplated by tourists with an eye that prompts a form of aesthetic detachment. Observing the everyday life of these African people via the tourist gaze, however, visitors are led to detach themselves from it, and this ultimately prevents them from grasping the place's authentic quality.

This example helps highlight the structural contradiction that is implicit in cultural tourism: experiencing the authentic everydayness of a certain place through aesthetic detachment. An analogous problem is known to arise in anthropology with regard to the case of so-called participant observation.³⁷ By practicing this method, the ethnologist finds herself in the following situation. She is expected to participate fully and immersively in the life of the community she is studying, but at the same time, she is also required to maintain the detached attitude that is needed to analyze, evaluate and describe what characterizes the relevant community as interesting, peculiar or distinctive.

Similarly, tourists look for a full immersion in what they assume should be the ordinary life of the selected destination - how life is really lived by the locals - yet they also expect to do so whilst maintaining the aesthetic attitude that is implicit in their role as visitors or outsiders. This creates friction, for it seems that in the very moment in which everydayness becomes the object of the tourist gaze, something of what is authentic of a place gets lost for the visitor. If tourists cannot escape their tourist gaze,³⁸ they end up wanting what by definition they cannot have precisely because they are tourists, i.e., grasping immersively the authentic nature of a place while detaching from it aesthetically.³⁹

Trapped in their role of aesthetic appreciators, tourists can only afford to seize the mere appearance of the real, ordinary life of the visited place. Not by chance, as Culler puts it, tourists "fan out" to collect these signs of authenticity:

[...] of Frenchness, typical Italian behavior, exemplary Oriental scenes, typical American thruways, traditional English pubs; and, deaf to the natives' explanations that thruways just are the most efficient way to get from one place to another or that pubs are simply convenient places to meet your friends and have a drink, [...] tourists persist in regarding these objects and practices as cultural signs.⁴⁰

Tour organizers, in turn, offer *signs* and *markers* of authenticity—souvenirs, postcards, statues, pictures—to influence how tourists think and feel with respect to the visited places.⁴¹ This process

becomes all the more important as the distance between one's normal place of residence and the object of the tourist gaze increases. Markers of authenticity provide the frame for what is worth gazing upon, so that authenticity ends up consisting in what *appears* or *looks* authentic.⁴² Authenticity in tourism is thus merely 'staged' or 'pretended', inasmuch as the toured object is designed and set up to be recognized and labeled as genuine or real.⁴³ Whatever it is that the tourist is going to see, it is no longer 'authentic' just because the tourists are there. In Culler's words:

The paradox, the dilemma of authenticity, is that to be experienced as authentic it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself, and hence lacks the authenticity of what is truly unspoiled, untouched by mediating cultural codes [...] The authentic sight requires markers, but our notion of the authentic is the unmarked.⁴⁴

4. Cultural Tourism and Everyday Aesthetics

Cultural tourism gives rise to a tension between a notion of the tourist gaze that entails some form of aesthetic detachment and the need to appreciate authentic features of a place's ordinary routine. Interestingly, a parallel concern characterizes the methodological debate in everyday aesthetics. Everyday aestheticians have thoroughly discussed how we can have an aesthetic experience of everyday life practices and activities. Among the several strategies that have been put forward in the debate, two main approaches have emerged. Either having an aesthetic appreciation of the ordinary is construed as implying a process of distancing, detachment, or estrangement from everyday life; or it is seen as requiring an attempt to aesthetically appreciate the ordinary as such. In the next sections, we will introduce these approaches in turn and apply them to the case of cultural tourism.

The former strategy proposed by everyday aestheticians to aesthetically appreciate everyday life claims that the ordinary can be aesthetically appreciated if we subject it to a process of 'defamiliarization,'⁴⁵ which aims at making it appear extra-ordinary and worthy of aesthetic interest. According to Allen Carlson,⁴⁶ defamiliarization comes in three main forms. The first is a version of classic formalism and consists in trying to seize aesthetically appreciable features in the formal aspects of things that are commonly thought to be lacking in aesthetic value, such as everyday objects.⁴⁷ The second interprets defamiliarization as a sort of "artification", that is, a mechanism through which everyday objects and situations are shaped into something 'art-like'.⁴⁸ The third construes defamiliarization as a process of 'aestheticization' of the everyday, through the adoption of an aesthetic attitude that "casts an aura" on the object of experience.⁴⁹ What is commonly taken to be aesthetically uninteresting is 'manipulated' so as to acquire an aesthetic appeal.

On all these accounts of defamiliarization, everyday life is regarded as so familiar, ordinary, and routine-like that it forms a kind of frameless background. In order for this background to count as a proper object for aesthetics, it needs to be rendered out-of-the-ordinary, unfamiliar, or strange: it needs, that is, to be put in a frame. The underlying intuition is that one can discover a surprisingly rich aesthetic dimension in the otherwise mundane and ordinary parts of daily life if one just isolates them from their ordinary context and sheds a different light on them. In John Dewey's terms,⁵⁰ this implies making the anesthetic flow of our everydayness become "an experience" endowed with pervasive character and a cohesive internal structure, and thus able to unearth latent aesthetic values in the most ordinary and routine.

Processes of distancing, estrangement, and "casting an aura", which are meant to make us appreciate what we generally overlook as humdrum routine, are admittedly in place in cultural tourism. As they turn flocks grazing in Maasai villages, cigar making in Cuban plantations, or eating a *pain au chocolat* in a Parisian café into aesthetic phenomena by adopting the tourist gaze, cultural tourists 'manipulate' these quotidian activities in order to make them the extraordinary object of their aesthetic appreciation.

A fruitful way of referring to defamiliarization is what Finnish philosopher Arto Haapala calls "strangeness."⁵¹ Strangeness is the basic experience we undergo when we find ourselves in a new environment, for example when we visit a foreign city for the first time and we try to navigate our way in the midst of unfamiliar streets and constructions. Experiencing strangeness, according to Haapala, leads to an intensification of our sensual perception resulting in a better appreciation of the environment's aesthetic features: "When we face something unfamiliar, we pay special attention to it. We observe the thing, we try to categorize it, we may think as to what to do with the object, whether it is of any use for us or not. We are also particularly attentive to its aesthetic potentiality."⁵² Strangeness involves the adoption of what Haapala terms the "outsider's gaze", an attitude that—owing to the lack of practical interests that characterize our attitude at home—makes us sensitive to details and features we generally ignore in our familiar environment, such as "the color of public transport vehicles, the color of telephone boxes, the sound of the metro cars, the smell of the sea, etc."⁵³ Just like the tourist gaze and the visitor's interest, the outsider's gaze implies a particular focus "on the look of things" (*ibid.*) and in this regard, provides the visitor with a particularly appropriate setting for aesthetic considerations.

A promising attitude when trying to appraise the aesthetic qualities of one's own routine, in the case of touristic practices defamiliarization widens the gap between the search for authenticity and the need for aesthetic pleasure and therefore risks intensifying the inherent contradiction of cultural tourism. As a matter of fact, activities such as animal feeding, craftsmanship, and having breakfast are functional to the aims of survival and, more generally, to human wellbeing.

As such, they require some form of practical engagement that contrasts with aesthetic detachment. Even though processes of defamiliarization may allow one to focus on some aesthetic salience of such activities that would otherwise remain in the background, they also make it so that their everyday quality remains out of reach. When residents' ordinary life is filtered through the tourist gaze, it lends itself to aesthetic appreciation only as long as its inherent ordinariness is rendered out-of-the-ordinary.

The second approach proposed by everyday aestheticians to reconcile aesthetic appreciation and everyday life maintains that we should be able to aesthetically grasp the ordinary *without* manipulating it, that is, to experience it 'as such'. Haapala,⁵⁴ for example, has argued that familiar places, although hardly surprising or new, nevertheless "give us pleasure through a kind of comforting stability, through the feeling of being at home and taking pleasure in carrying out normal routines in a setting that is 'safe'". Alternatively, it is possible to point out how aesthetic experiences, judgments, and values are intertwined with other experiences, judgments, and values that are central to people's daily lives. One can focus for instance on the pleasure gained by the appropriate functioning of commonplace objects and tools, thereby considering the intersection of aesthetic and practical concerns,⁵⁵ or dwell on the role played by the knowledge one has of a familiar object's function and significance for its aesthetic appreciation.⁵⁶

Within this framework, Yuriko Saito has remarked on the importance of paying mindful attention to all neglected features of the ordinary. Assuming a mindful attitude - be it eminently perceptual, affective or cognitive⁵⁷ - can make one uncover aesthetic qualities even in those apparently humdrum aspects of the daily grind.⁵⁸ Attentiveness is indeed what discloses the aesthetic value of things. It is the prerequisite of any kind of aesthetic experience and leads one to grasp what is aesthetically valuable without distorting their everyday nature, therefore discarding a purely 'honorific' understanding of aesthetics.⁵⁹ Not only beauty and sublimity, but also functionality, comfort, safety, and familiarity; not only traditionally positive values, but also negative qualities such as dreariness, tediousness, or monotony may thus appear to be aesthetically significant.⁶⁰

This mindful focus on the neglected aesthetic aspects of everyday life, however, should not be understood as a form of detached contemplation. It is rather a participatory form of perception that leads the subject to immerse herself in what she experiences and actively interact with it. Throughout his long career in aesthetics, Arnold Berleant has been investigating this participatory model of aesthetic appreciation as the counterpart of the detached attitude that, to his mind, has been the predominant paradigm in Western aesthetic theorizing so far.⁶¹ There is, according to Berleant, an aesthetically relevant way of relating not only to artworks but to our environment in the broadest possible sense that does not require distance or detachment. On

the contrary, the most desirable and efficient aesthetic attitude requires that one *engages* with what one is experiencing.

Engagement entails a form of active and immersive perception, i.e., a perceptual activity that is enhanced and sustained by the knowledge one has of a certain place or object, the social and cultural meanings attached to them, personal and collective associations, imaginings, and memories. Importantly, this implies the loss of primacy of visual awareness, which is overtaken by the involvement of all senses including kinesthesia, that is, one's bodily awareness of the environment. As Berleant puts it, this way of perceiving is "*direct* rather than pure" in that it is immediate, unreflective, but at the same time composite and complex. This immersive perception, which puts us in contact with the environment, is aesthetic in its own right: "It is in this sense that we engage aesthetically with environment and other modes of art. Perceptual engagement is the catalyzing and unifying force of the aesthetic field."⁶²

If they can be conceived as mindfully engaged perceivers, the aesthetic subjects are no longer separated from the object of their experience. Rather, they are seen as part of an *aesthetic field* of forces that interact with one another resulting in an "integrated and unified experience" of aesthetic appreciation.⁶³ The physical juxtaposition between a subject and an object is transformed into a personal encounter that activates a primitive and unreflective form of engagement.

Applied to cultural tourism, the engagement paradigm implies that the tourist practice be reconfigured as an immersive relation to the toured place, environment, or cultural habit, rather than as a form of aesthetic detachment. This multisensory perceptual immersion mobilizes all possible cognitive resources that integrate the perceptual access to the visited place. Viewed through the lenses of aesthetic immersion, the tourist appears to be part of the surrounding environment as an actor rather than as a spectator. In turn, to paraphrase Berleant, the tourist destination is redescribed as a realm of dynamic powers that engage both the tourist and the visited place, the people, and their habits, in a unified experience "turning the world we inhabit into a truly human habitation".⁶⁴ Accordingly, as in all instances of aesthetic engagement, aesthetic experience becomes a dynamic process emerging from the interaction between the tourist and the visited object, environment, or situation. And just like the subject of aesthetic engagement, if the tourist becomes aware of the process in which she is immersed, then she might become more receptive, attentive, open, and disposed to grab all inputs coming from the surrounding context. In the next section, we will analyse these possible attitude changes in more detail.

5. Aesthetic Engagement in Cultural Tourism

As we have seen, the aesthetic engagement paradigm provides an alternative theoretical framework to that of aesthetic detachment offered by the tourist gaze, one that appears beneficial for addressing

the internal frictions characterizing cultural tourism. Notably, the problems of a defamiliarizing approach to tourist practices have also been explored by recent scholarship in tourism. In the past decades, researchers have increasingly questioned the efficacy of Urry's notion, underlying the performative and multi-sensuous nature of the act of gazing and the complex relations and dynamics it involves. This insistence on 'the gaze' has been criticized for entailing a mind/body dualistic framework, which portrays tourists as detached, passive observers and reduces them to a dematerialised pair of eyes.⁶⁵ In this sense, Urry's gaze overlooks the importance of the body and of the other senses in the tourist experience.⁶⁶ Based on this concern, a shift has been invoked from how tourists *look at* what they visit touristic localities, to what tourists *do* with their bodies – how they proactively engage in and with space. Prioritizing agency and performativity to visual aspects and sight, tourism has thus been reassessed as a matter of performing – a practical, sensual, and embodied encounter with the world - rather than as a purely visual experience.

In this approach, the body is not treated merely as a thing or a tool for doing something but rather as a situated vector allowing for an embodied reconfiguration of touristic experience. This interest in the body as an active, expressive, and sensitive "body-subject"⁶⁷ has opened to novel trajectories in tourism studies investigating the multi-sensory dimension of tourism. Research highlights the role of senses like taste, smell, touch, sound, and proprioception, either taken separately or in combination, in tourist practices.⁶⁸ For example, it has been pointed out that auditory components have a crucial impact on how tourists relate to the visited location - think of the silence of the wide, open spaces of wild nature compared to the chaotic background of the metropolis. Furthermore, taste and smell significantly contribute to articulating the tourist experience - consider for instance the importance odors have in characterizing the perceived identity of a destination or how much culinary traditions influence our overall sense of place. Finally, haptic senses including touch, kinesthesia, and proprioception have a key function in structuring the space in which one is immersed via the relationship between one's body, the encountered objects (e.g., buildings, urban and natural elements, formal and implicit borders), and people. This way of conceiving of experience in tourism as heterogeneous, multimodal, and immersive also entails that aesthetic pleasure in cultural tourism results from an engaged exercise of immersion in the material and cultural environment rather than from a form of detached attitude.

While the relevance of embodiment and multi-sensoriality has produced a fruitful debate in recent tourism scholarship, we suggest that further theoretical effort may help to fully unveil the potential of this embodied approach in tourism studies. In this regard, the conceptual tools provided by current discussions in everyday aesthetics seem to offer an inspiring base to clarify aspects of the embodied interplay between tourists and the encountered cultural world. In particular, the notion of aesthetic engagement, as discussed in the previous section, may foster and

complement this ‘embodied turn’ in tourism studies emphasizing the complex interaction between tourists and the aesthetic ‘field of forces’ around them.

First, as we have seen, aesthetic engagement implies that the tourist is seen as acknowledging her own position in space-time and is aware of the specific contribution she can give to the context she participates in. As advocates of engagement contend, thinking of aesthetic experience as an active and immersive form of perception can foster the development of a special aesthetic sensibility, which may encourage more mindful forms of relationship with our surroundings. While Berleant defines this kind of sensibility as a culturally bound sense-perception emerging in the interconnectedness of individuals, environment, society, and culture, Saito contrasts it with Western traditional aesthetic sensibility based on detachment.⁶⁹ However described, this ‘new’ aesthetic sensibility demands that we go beyond our normal attitude towards the objects and the environment that surround us and that we:

[...] encourage ourselves to put aside preconceived ideas associated with them and allow them to speak to us and engage us. Such open-mindedness and receptivity have ethical importance. They also guide us to live mindfully by paying careful attention to things and surroundings. In short, our aesthetic horizons become widened and our lives enriched.⁷⁰

In the specific case of cultural tourism, the emergence of this aesthetic sensibility might enable the tourist to appreciate her experience as a visitor immersively by plunging herself into that experience, interacting with the local people, and, possibly, partaking in their practices in a more mindful way.⁷¹ Opposed to the distancing gaze promoted by the touristic machine, the assumption of an embodied, participatory attitude would thus reduce the gap between the tourist as a detached subject and the explored culture as a museified object. Once aesthetic distance is removed, the tourist may find herself more prone to grasp and enjoy a wide variety of aspects of the resort, including the negative ones, which the standard marketing advertisements often try to hide. Indeed, despite what the tourism industry promises, the reality around us is not an “aesthetic utopia”.⁷² There are no heavenly corners, untouched paradises, or unaffected oases that are able to fully satisfy our quest for pure aesthetic appreciation. Every place comprises aspects and elements that can harm our aesthetic sensibility and obstruct our taste, ranging from the cheap-looking objects and poorly-made souvenirs in local stores to the stench of Paris *métro* stations, the endless lines before monuments and historical buildings, the disillusioned and un-inspired attitude of the local guide, the constant and widespread presence of technologies even in the most remote and uncontaminated land, insipid traditional cuisine disappointing our expectations, and so on and so forth.

Furthermore, in the immediacy and immersiveness of the engagement experience, visitors may be more open to accept, understand, and appreciate all aspects of the visited place's quotidian life for what they are, without necessarily striving for signs of staged and possibly counterfeit authenticity. One possible consequence of this shift is that tourists become more inclined to appreciate in a playful and ironic way even the more kitsch, vulgar, unsophisticated, or unconventional aspects of the destination and may thereby avoid incurring in those typical forms of disappointment that result from a preemptive idealization of the visited place.⁷³

Finally, if the tourist gaze is reconfigured as a mindful, engaged attitude, and if such an attitude can be adopted in one's own everyday life, then being a tourist may not be so different from being able to appreciate one's own familiar environment. This might help soften the radical opposition between one's aesthetic experience as a tourist and one's experience at home to a point where it becomes aesthetically irrelevant. In this spirit, many recent studies have pointed out how the sharp dichotomy between the ordinariness of everyday life and the extraordinariness of tourism may not be as clear-cut as it seems to be. This dichotomy, it has been claimed, has been artificially construed for research purposes but is rather unfaithful to the reality of cultural tourism.⁷⁴ Through engagement, subjects may be led to switch off "the autopilot" of their everyday life⁷⁵ and may thus find themselves better equipped to enjoy their familiar milieu and the practicalities it involves. As tourists, they may become more open and sensitive to anything the place and its inhabitants may show them.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we argued that cultural tourism, considered as an aesthetic practice, is intrinsically problematic. Motivated by the search for aesthetic fulfillment through the detachment that characterizes the 'tourist gaze', cultural tourism is also driven by a quest for immersion in the authentic everyday routines of the visited places. These two desiderata, however, seem to be mutually irreconcilable. We examined this tension by considering the two alternative approaches proposed by everyday aestheticians on how to account for the aesthetic appreciation of everyday objects, habits, and situations. Based on this discussion, we outlined what we contend are the main advantages of adopting an engaged, mindful attitude when practicing cultural tourism. Abandoning a detached and objectifying gaze, the engaged tourist manages to immerse herself in the cultural habits of the visited resort. This process of aesthetic immersion reduces the distance between the visitor and the local and encourages tourists to go beyond the markers of authenticity imposed by the standard tourism advertising. Importantly, while the shift from detachment to engagement requires the refinement of one's aesthetic sensitivity, it also leads to an enrichment of tourists' embodied experience.

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² Boorstin, D. J. *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961/1992); MacCannell, D. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (University of California Press, 1976/1999).

³ See for example: Adler, J. "Travel as a Performed Art," *American Journal of Sociology* 94 n. 6 (1989): 1366-1391; Tribe, J., ed., *Philosophical Issues in Tourism* (London: Channel View Press, 2009); Todd, C. "The Importance of the Aesthetic," in *Routledge Handbook of Tourism and the Environment*, edited by A. Holden and D. Fennell (New York: Routledge, 2012), 65-74.

⁴ See, respectively: Saito, Y. *Aesthetics of the Familiar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Di Stefano, E. *Che cos'è l'estetica quotidiana* (Carocci: Roma, 2018); Highmore, B. "Homework: Routine, social aesthetics and the ambiguity of everyday life," *Cultural Studies*, 18, n. 2-3 (2004): 306-327; Diaconu, M. "Longing for Clouds: Does Beautiful Weather Have to Be Fine?," *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 15 (2013); Iannilli, G.L. "How Can Everyday Aesthetics Meet Fashion?," *Studi di Estetica*, 7 (2017): 229-246; Norman, D. *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Shove, E., Watson, M., Hand, M. and Ingram, J. *The Design of Everyday Life*. (Oxford: Berg, 2007); Tuan, Y. *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture*, (Washington, D. C.: Island Press, 1993); Carlson, A. "On the Aesthetic Appreciation of Japanese Gardens," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 37, n. 1 (1997): 47-56; Brady, E., Brook, I., and Prior, J., eds., *Between Nature and Culture: The Aesthetics of Modified Environments* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018); Carlson, A. *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2000); Parsons, G., Allen C. *Functional Beauty*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Parsons, G. *The Philosophy of Design* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016); van Etteger, R., Thompson, I. H., and Vicenzotti, V. "Aesthetic Creation Theory and Landscape Architecture," *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 11 (2016): 80-89.

⁵ Mandoki, K. *Everyday Aesthetics. Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁶ Among the few contributions on tourism, the following are worth mentioning: Rynänen, M. "Learning from Venice," *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 1, (2005) and Salazar, G. "Another One Bites the Dust!" *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 8 (2010).

⁷ Cf. UNWTO - International Tourist Organisation (2019).

⁸ Cohen, E. "A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences," *Sociology*, 13, n. 2 (1979): 179-201; Urry, J. *The Tourist Gaze* (London: SAGE, 1990/2002).

⁹ See, for example: Franklin, A. "Art tourism: A new field for tourist studies," *Tourist Studies*, 18, n. 4 (2018): 399-416.

¹⁰ See: McKercher, B., Du Cros, H. *Cultural Tourism*, 3rd Edition. (New York: Routledge, 2020). In the literature these practices are often referred to as 'cultural heritage tourism' or 'heritage tourism'. In this text we prefer the label 'cultural tourism' in that it seems to better highlight the difference between such practices and art tourism.

¹¹ World Tourism Organization. 2018. UNWTO Annual Report 2017, <https://www.unwto.org/global/publication/unwto-annual-report-2017>. Accessed 03/12/2021.

¹² <https://localadventures.travel/experience/tanzania-cultural-excursions-c092410>. Accessed 09/08/2021.

¹³ See for example: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. *Destination Culture. Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (University of California Press, 1998); Richards, G. *Rethinking Cultural Tourism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2021).

¹⁴ McKercher, Du Cros, *Cultural Tourism*, 30.

¹⁵ McKercher, Du Cros, *Cultural Tourism*, 37.

¹⁶ Said, E. W. *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978); Richards, G. *Rethinking Cultural Tourism*. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2021); Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*.

¹⁷ Richards, *Rethinking Cultural Tourism*.

¹⁸ Todd, "Nature, Beauty and Tourism," and "The Importance of the Aesthetic"; Naukarinen, O. "Aesthetics and Mobility - A Short Introduction into a Moving Field", *Contemporary Aesthetics*, n. 3 (2005); Kirillova, K., Lehto, X. "Destination Aesthetics and Aesthetic Distance in Tourism Experience," *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 32, n. 8 (2015). In an attempt to overcome the dominant, over-simplistic view in the consumer behavior literature that reduces tourist aesthetic evaluation to a single dimensional variable such as "the place is beautiful", Kirillova and Lehto (2015) put forward a multi-dimensional model for the assessment of tourist satisfaction. The identified variables, ranging from sound, to balance, to shape, demonstrate the existence, relevance and complexity of an aesthetic component in tourism.

¹⁹ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*.

²⁰ Adler, "Travel as a Performed Art", 1370.

²¹ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 4-5.

²² Harrison, R., *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (New York, Routledge, 2013), 107.

²³ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2.

²⁴ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 3.

²⁵ Howard, C.A. *Mobile Lifeworlds: An Ethnography of Tourism and Pilgrimage in the Himalayas*. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 34.

²⁶ Bullough, E. "'Psychical distance' as a factor in art and an aesthetic principle," *British Journal of Psychology*, 5 (1912): 87-118.

²⁷ Berleant, A. *Art and Engagement* (Temple University Press, 1991), 32; Scruton, R. *Modern Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 36, maintains that the 'visitor' provides the paradigmatic case of aesthetic gaze.

²⁸ Todd, "The Importance of the Aesthetic", 72.

²⁹ Taylor, J. *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist's Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

³⁰ Kirillova, Lehto, "Destination Aesthetics and Aesthetic Distance in Tourism Experience", 12.

³¹ MacCannell, D. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (University of California Press, 1976/1999), 94.

³² Ibid.

³³ Boorstin, D. J. *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961/1992); MacCannell, D. "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings," *American Journal of Sociology*, 79 (1973): 589–603; Cohen, E. "A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences," *Sociology*, 13, n. 2 (1979): 179–201 and "Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15 (1988): 371–386; Wang, J. "Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26, n. 2 (1999): 349–370; Taylor, J. "Authenticity and Sincerity in Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28 (2001): 17–26; Reisinger, Y., Steiner, C.J. "Reconceptualizing object authenticity," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33, n. 1 (2006): 65–86.

³⁴ MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 49.

³⁵ MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 42–48. See also Turner, V., Turner E. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

³⁶ Culler, J. "Semiotics of Tourism," *American Journal of Semiotics*, 1 n. 1/2 (1981): 127–40.

³⁷ Malinowski, B. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul LTD, 1922).

³⁸ Todd, "The Importance of the Aesthetic", 72.

³⁹ In a previous work, we have treated this problem as a "paradox". See Benenti, M., Giombini L. "The Aesthetic Paradox of Tourism," in *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, edited by V. Moura and C. Vaughan, 12 (2020): 1–31.

⁴⁰ Culler, "Semiotics of Tourism", 127.

⁴¹ MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 110. The notion of a marker, here, stands for any kind of information or representation (signboards, touristic signals, pamphlets) that constitutes a touristic attraction by giving information about it, representing it, making it recognizable.

⁴² Culler, "Semiotics of Tourism", 5.

⁴³ MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*.

⁴⁴ Culler, "Semiotics of Tourism", 8.

⁴⁵ See: Saito, Y. *Everyday Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and *Aesthetics of the Familiar*.

⁴⁶ Carlson, A. "The Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics," in *Aesthetics of Everyday Life: East and West*, edited by L. Yuedi and C.L. Carter, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 48–64.

⁴⁷ Carlson mutuates this conception from such art critics as Clive Bell and Roger Fry who defended formalism at the beginning of the 20th century.

⁴⁸ Dissanayake, E. "Becoming Homo Aestheticus: Sources of Aesthetic Imagination in Mother-Infant Interactions," *Substance*, 30, n. 1/2 (2001): 85–103; Naukkarinen, "Aesthetics and Mobility - A Short Introduction into a Moving Field".

⁴⁹ Leddy, T. *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Broadview Press, 2012).

⁵⁰ Dewey, J. *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Press, 1934).

⁵¹ Haapala, A. "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place," in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, edited by A. Light and J.M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 39–55.

⁵² Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place", 44.

⁵³ Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place", 43–44.

⁵⁴ Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place", 50.

⁵⁵ Forsey, J. "The Promise, the Challenge, of Everyday Aesthetics," *Aisthesis*, 7, n. 1 (2014): 5–21.

⁵⁶ Carlson, "The Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics", 48–64.

⁵⁷ See respectively, Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*; Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place"; Carlson, "The Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics".

⁵⁸ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*.

⁵⁹ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 27.

⁶⁰ See respectively: Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place"; Carlson, "The Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics"; and Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

⁶¹ Berleant, *Art and Engagement*.

⁶² Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, 92.

⁶³ Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, 49. For a perspective combining the idea of "aesthetic field" with the notion of extended mind, see: Matteucci, G., *Eстетика e natura umana. La mente estesa tra percezione, emozione ed espressione* (Roma: Carocci, 2019).

⁶⁴ Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, 104.

⁶⁵ Veijola, S., Jokinen, E. "The Body in Tourism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 11, n. 3 (1994): 125–51.

⁶⁶ Accordingly, the tourist gaze has been criticized for exemplifying a masculine, western-based, white middle-class perspective, as well as for not paying sufficient attention to the multiple sensual, practical, and material aspects of tourism (Veijola, Jokinen, "The Body in Tourism," is the *locus classicus* for this criticism. For recent discussion see: Everingham P., Obrador, P., and Tucker, H. "Trajectories of embodiment in Tourist Studies," *Tourist Studies*, 21, n. 1 (2021): 70–83.

⁶⁷ Obrador, P. "Being-on-Holiday: Tourist Dwelling, Bodies and Place," *Tourist Studies* 3, n. 1 (2003): 47–66.

⁶⁸ Everingham, Obrador, and Tucker, "Trajectories of embodiment in Tourist Studies".

⁶⁹ See respectively, Berleant, A. "Aesthetic Sensibility," *Ambiances. Pragmatism Today* 6, n. 2 (2015): 38–47 and Saito, "Aesthetics of the Familiar", 46.

⁷⁰ Saito, Y. "The Ethical Dimensions of Aesthetic Engagement," *ESPES*, 6, n. 2 (2017): 17–18.

⁷¹ From this perspective, it would be interesting to take into account the point of view of the local communities with which tourists interact: service providers, workers who guide the tourists throughout the sites, and local people enduring the many side effects of mass tourism including the gentrification of residential areas, museification, etc. Exploring such a point of view, however, is the matter for further inquiry.

⁷² Saito, "The Ethical Dimensions of Aesthetic Engagement", 26.

⁷³ See, for example, De Botton, A. *The Art of Travel* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004). On average, twenty Japanese tourists among the millions that visit Paris every year are so disconcerted by the gap between reality and their idealized image of the city, that they fall prey to the so-called *Paris syndrome*, a condition characterized by a number of psychiatric symptoms including delusional states, derealization, depersonalization and anxiety (Viala, A., Ota, H., Vacheron, M.N., Martin, P., and Caroli, F. “Les japonais en voyage pathologique à Paris: un modèle original de prise en charge transculturelle,” *Nervure de journal Psychiatrie*, 5 (2004): 31–34). According to a BBC report, the disease is spreading to different countries now, with many Chinese tourists experiencing the same issue. To discourage calls about the Paris Syndrome, the Japanese embassy had even to post a disclaimer on its website.

⁷⁴ De Botton, *The Art of Travel*; Uriely, N. “The tourist experience. Conceptual developments,” *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32, n. 1 (2005): 199–216; Bærenholdt, O. J., Haldrup, M., Larsen, J., and Urry, J. *Performing tourist places* (Hants, Burlington: Ashgate, 2007); Larsen, J. “De-exoticizing tourist travel: everyday life and sociality on the move,” *Leisure Studies*, 27 (2008): 21–34; Stylianou-Lambert, T. “Gazing from Home: Cultural Tourism and Art Museums,” *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38, n. 2 (2011): 403–21.

⁷⁵ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 24.