

INTRODUCTION: THE AESTHETICS OF ATTENTION

We are surrounded by a proliferation of channels, streams, and texts clamoring to be consumed. Images are produced, made public, and circulated on an unparalleled scale. When we click, search, and “like,” our attention is measured, curiously scrutinized, and commodified, resulting in what some scholars have identified as the rise of an *attention economy*. The phrase that attention is something you *pay*, has been literalized in the neoliberal era of digitalization.

More broadly the concept of attention can be related to issues of selection, norms, struggle, and bias. In the process of sorting, one cannot help but miss something, and this is a condition, not only in contemporary media culture, but also for perception and experience at an ontological level. In what ways is it possible to conceptualize the “attentional” agency of the subject of experience? How might aesthetic objects and practices—artworks and aesthetic phenomena in a broader sense—as well as contemporary media ecologies be seen as facilitators of certain modes of attention?

The first part of the present issue of *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* concerns the relationship between aesthetics and attention in various ways: in philosophical aesthetics, in art institutions, within the field of art histories, in contemporary media, and in cultural criticism. The articles in this part of the issue all stem from the annual conference of the Nordic Society for Aesthetics, *The Aesthetics of Attention*, which was held at Aarhus University and online, May 20–21, 2021.

The first section revolves specifically around relations between attention and perception and is opened by Yves Citton, who in the article “Attention Disorders between Impairment and Ferality—Towards a Political Aesth-Ethics of Dismantlement” reflects on the increasing number of children and adults diagnosed with ADHD by discussing the phenomenon in relation to the categories of “impairment” and “disorder.” The article raises the question of whether attentional issues would benefit from a double reframing, meaning that we to a wider extent could regard ADHD as collective and organizational issues instead of as merely individual shortcomings. Following up on the relation between attention and perception, Anette Vandsø, in her article “Silence! The Background of Attention as a Battleground,” tunes in to the US debates

regarding background music in the 1950s by focusing on our relation to our background environment. Vandsø discusses John Cage's aesthetics of silence to nuance the complex interplay between aesthetics, attention, and intention in relation to notions of background. The background is also perceptually foregrounded in Matti Tainio's article "Nothing to See? Paying Attention in the Dark Environment" that provides a meditation on the aesthetic experience of being present in an old forest in the darkest night. He describes and analyzes his visit to the deep natural darkness, while connecting this distinct experience to Edmund Burke and contemporary aesthetic theories. Maja Bak Herrie and Mette-Marie Zacher Sørensen also examine a specific case of perception, namely the mediation of typing indicators—"..."—in online messaging. In their article "Stay with Me: Uncertain Indices and Attentional Presence in Chat Interfaces," they analyze how typing indicators, the dots as interface design, mediate the complex communication situation and interfere with our emotional lives. From the perspectives of semiotics and attentional ecologies, the authors describe and outline the acts of writing and waiting as indicators of attentional presence.

The following section of articles all have in common that they relate to genres of art. Turning to film, poetry, or visual art, the articles discuss questions of attention in relation to different artistic practices and strategies. The first article in this section, Bernardita M. Cubillos' "Keeping the War Outside the Frame: Ellipsis as a Means of Redirection Toward Women's Perspectives in Two War Narratives," takes its point of departure in film. Examining Yasujiro Ozu's *Sanma no aji* (1962) and Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019), Cubillos explores the potentials of cinema to challenge dominant narratives and encourage alternative approaches to representing violence and social roles. In the following article, "Infrastructural Poetics in Yahya Hassan and Shadi Angelina Bazeghi," Solveig Daugaard turns to contemporary Danish poetry in order to examine the relationship between the concepts of infrastructure and attention. Examining the poetic practices of Yahya Hassan and Shadi Angelina Bazeghi, Daugaard studies the conditions for the production, circulation, and reception of poetry in Denmark as they are mediated by literary institutions and liberal news media. As the title indicates, Patrick van Rossem's article "Attention in Art Since the 1960s: An Exploration of the Ways in Which Artists Have Tried to Get the Attention of Their Audience" investigates artistic strategies to slow spectators down and achieve more attentive gazes. Considering artworks

from the 1960's and 70's as well as contemporary pieces, van Rossem discusses the relation between the subject of attention and the advent of mass audiences.

Turning to issues regarding everyday aesthetics, the following section is opened by Claire Anscomb, who in her article “#Filterdrop: Attending to Photographic Alterations” considers attentional effects and perceptual experience in relation to digital manipulation and alteration of portrait photographs. Sue Spaid, in the article “Your Tongue Here (or Not): On Imagining Whether to Take a Bite (or Not),” explores the saliency of “disgust” given its role in the “attention economy.” Investigating the relationship between taste and disgust, Spaid points to the under-explored connection between imagination and attention stressing that human beings are prone to feel disgust, yet *what* disgusts is learnt. Borderline cases of art are in the centre of Jean Lin’s article “Multiple Identities of Borderline Cases in Art,” especially when occurring in non-art categories. Debating artistic status, Lin argues that a work of art can possess multiple identities depending on the context in which it is present, shifting the perspective from *whether* the case is art, to *when* it is art.

The articles in the last section of this part of the present issue of the journal concern fundamental theoretical questions regarding the aesthetics of attention. Based on the observation of how different kinds of relationality and attentional foci were differentiated during Modernity, Morten Kyndrup, in the article “Attention and Aesthetic Value,” discusses—in critical dialogue with current calls for dedifferentiation and dissolution of the boundaries of art—the ways in which the “freedoms” of art and its audience, respectively, have been pre-configured and institutionalized in light of the modern division between *poiesis* and *aesthesis*. The article “Attention, Affect, and Aesthetic Experience” by Henrik Kaare Nielsen aims to conceptualize the interrelationship between attention, affect, and aesthetic experience, and proposes a distinction between different types of affects based on their potential for elaborating the Kantian concept of aesthetic experience and for reflecting different attentional qualities. Sharing Kyndrup’s and Nielsen’s interest in different kinds and qualities of attention, Francesca Natale, in her article “On the Performativity of Disinterested Attention for the Experience of Contemporary Art,” analyzes performative inactivity as an attentional practice connected to non-productivity, non-instrumentality, disinterestedness, and contemplation. She shows how a notion of “disinterested attention”—developed by Bence Nanay

based on a reinterpretation of Kant's notion of disinterestedness—can help understand the seemingly unproblematic move from passive spectator to active participant in contemporary art and argues that experiencing art involves a fluctuating, suspended, and fragmented way of paying attention. Finally, in the article “Kant's ‘Aesthetic Idea’: Towards an Aesthetics of Non-Attention,” Frederik Tygstrup discusses the de-limitation of attention instigated by the “aesthetic idea” in Kant and, through a reinterpretation of *The Critique of Judgment*, tries to develop a mode of aesthetic sensibility that reposit aesthetics in a field of relational interdependency, which challenges the Cartesian subject-object structure generally at play in Kant's aesthetics.

The thematic part on the aesthetics of attention is rounded off by a review of Federico Campagna's *Prophetic Culture: Recreation for Adolescents* by Anna Enström titled “Critique of the Power of Prophecy.”

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