

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Book Review Forum

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Welcome to inaugural book review forum for *The Canadian Geographer-Le Géographe canadien*. The purpose here is to provide a setting for in-depth, diverse, and dialogical reviews of landmark publications in geography and cognate disciplines. I hope to include a book review forum every year or so and invite readers to contact me with book recommendations for such a purpose. I am especially interested in hearing about recent groundbreaking books related to physical geography, earth system dynamics, and spatial and geographic information science (fields that I am less familiar with). The following forum is based on an editors meet critics session (organized by myself), which took place during the afternoon of March 31, 2016 at the American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting in San Francisco. I am also delighted to include a review by Gwilym Eades (who did not participate in the above session) as part of the forum.

In recent years, a growing number of geographers have begun to advocate empirical, theoretical, and methodological re-evaluations of the aesthetic. These geographers suggest that rather than positioning the aesthetic as subordinate or supplementary to the social and political, we should aim to recognize how the aesthetic constitutes the very conceptual bearings and concrete realms through which social and political spaces become comprehensible and operational. One of the most recent and significant contributions to this research is

Geographical Aesthetics: Imagining Space, Staging Encounters edited by Harriet Hawkins and Elizabeth Straughan. Across 15 chapters, *Geographical Aesthetics* brings together timely commentaries by international, interdisciplinary scholars to rework historical relations between geography and aesthetics, and provide alternative understandings of what constitutes aesthetics. In renewing aesthetics as a site of investigation, but also an analytic object through which we can think about worldly encounters, *Geographical Aesthetics* presents a reworking of our geographical imaginary of the aesthetic.

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Geographical Aesthetics: Imagining Space, Staging Encounters

edited by Harriet Hawkins and Elizabeth Straughan, Routledge, New York and London, 2015, 320 pp., cloth US\$119.95 (ISBN 978-1409448013)

Review by Stuart C. Aitken, San Diego State University

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This is such a well-placed book, elaborating an assemblage of ideas that comes on the heels of post-structural feminism, post-qualitative methods, non-representational theories, and new politicized phenomenologies to provide a relatively coherent

politics of the world, its surfaces, and its depths, that does not eschew the complexities of bodies, politics, perceptions, representations, sensibilities, affects, and encounters. The introduction, copious section commentaries, and a conclusion that brings things together through geo-aesthetics help enormously with this project by situating and elaborating the wisdom of geographical aesthetics, twisting our disciplined knowledge in subtle ways towards a clear disturbance of collective sensibilities.

Geographical aesthetics comprise wisdom that pre-sages the discipline (see della Dora) and is as new as the next best continental philosophy (see Millner) or scientific breakthrough (see Paterson and Dixon)—and embraces a material practicality that might enliven even the most weary and cynical academic activist (see Millner, and Dawkins and Loftus). Perhaps the most endearing (and lively) aspect of *Geographical Aesthetics* is the enduring tension between sensible codified conventions and sensuous experiences, between bodies and spaces (see McNally), between rarefied high culture and everyday experiences (see Brady, Vasudevan), between sense and non-sense (see Dixon, Dawkins and Loftus), between art and judgement (see Vasudevan, Riding), between research, writing (see Riding), and field-work (e.g., the introduction's and the third section's Humboldtian aesthetics, but also Macpherson, Dixon). There are careful considerations of the work of aesthetics, what it does, and how it does it (McNally, Brady, Holloway and Morris), but perhaps most appealing are the political tensions in the book that enable some understanding and sleuthing around the distributions of the sensible and its disturbances.

It is impossible to cover the breadth of a book of this kind in a short review, so I want to concentrate on the spaces, sites, encounters, and spatialities of radical and revolutionary play (but see Milner, Dawkins and Loftus, Riding). In the essay, "Old Forgotten Children's Books," Benjamin (1996a, 408) notes that "[i]n waste products [children] recognize the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them. In using these things, they do not so much imitate the works of adults as bring together in the artifact produced in play, materials of widely different kinds in a new, intuitive relationship." His Marxist sensibilities enable Benjamin to not only uncover the darker side of landscapes, but also suggest a way through them that is about our own creation and recreation, as well as that which surrounds. Benjamin (1996b, 465) goes on to note that "[t]he dining room table under which [the child] is crouching turns him into the wooden idol in a temple whose four pillars are carved legs. And behind a door, he himself is the door." Child and adult play is mimetic not just in the sense of copying something, but also as a radical flash of inspiration and creativity that embraces, connects, performs, or uses something differently. Geological strata and the tracings of death, for example, help map the depths of human frailties and also its hopes (see Macpherson, Riding). Each encounter is a way of coming to consciousness, a way of residing, and/or a way of transformation. The fluidity of playful sites, spaces, and encounters is a fiction, a staging and a restaging of the act of playing, and it is key to its pleasures. In this sense play is identity making and it is also world making. The aesthetics of play is about learning and toying with the meanings and practices of social worlds, but as Benjamin reminds, it is also where received meanings and relations are refused and

reworked (Katz 2011). For Benjamin, the material world was rendered by fascist politics, which contrived a particularly insidious aesthetics (see introduction). Play, then, is also about differentiating self and material objects from a world that is oriented elsewhere and elsewhen. This is the kind of play seen in chapters by Kingsbury, Milner, Dawkins and Loftus, Macpherson, Dixon, and Riding. It is about reproduction and constituting difference in a homologous world of seemingly incontrovertible fascism or, for us, perhaps, neoliberal market structures. The aesthetics of play are not about the child situated in the sandbox's ecological niche, they are about reproducing the box and the sand in a fundamentally reconstituted way. They are about disturbing the distribution of the sensible. That is precisely the work, the doing, of this book.

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Review by Sarah de Leeuw, University of Northern British Columbia

DOI: 10.1111/cag.12289

A tiny worry-worm niggles at me as I write this review. In Chapter 2, to illustrate Freud's concept of sublimation as the process by which an original sexual drive finds satisfaction in some achievement no longer sexual but of a higher social or ethical valuation, the author offers "an excessively scornful book review [as actually being] sublimated aggressiveness" (p. 54). Yikes! Right from the get-go I'm reminded this edited collection—arguably an aesthetic object given the evocatively fragile white wax fingertip-imprint mushroom caps by climate change artist Miriam Burke adorning its cover—has power, an "operational and generative force" (p. 110) that can produce a certain kind of subject-positionality in readers (e.g., me) who engage it.

The slight nervous agitation I feel by Chapter 2 is at the core of many conversations in this book about geographies and aesthetics, which is a concept the editors and authors all seem to agree is a complicated, often spatially and temporally specific, sometimes contradictory, and certainly slippery idea. Despite the complicated nature of aesthetics, the chapters all more or less agree that studying the concept involves (here I'll be a teensy bit simplistic and reductive) on the one hand, *stuff*, and, on the other hand, *engagers of that stuff*—engagers who encounter, experience, theorize, or are moved by the stuff. The editors and authors also rightfully take umbrage with (1) aesthetics being rendered as superficial stuff not worthy of careful analysis, and (2) people engaging or producing that stuff as being simplistically in search of escapist sensorial experiences beyond thought and rationality, which (the authors

and editors tend to agree on this point too) still occupy an exalted register in geographic research.

Indeed, at the core of this text is call for geographers to place (I use this term deliberately) complicated terms and concepts (and their associated ontological or material referents) like aesthetics under scrutiny so as to develop a more nuanced understanding of risky conceptual currents. By doing this, we geographers may be able to more fully understand and deploy concepts like aesthetics within our own terrains of practice and theorization. I agree! And *Geographical Aesthetics* is fairly successful in this effort, offering a multi-faceted and even multi-sensorial inquiry into the geographies of aesthetics and their potential to the discipline.

I would suggest, however (despite risking characterization as a sublimated aggressor!), there are some weaknesses in the text, resulting in gaps where some more work could be done. *Geographical Aesthetics*, as its editors point out, is in conversation with much broader and historically elongated traditions in human geography. I fully endorse the rich historicization at work in the text (see especially the Introduction, *For Geographical Aesthetics*, and Dixon's Chapter 11). Such historicization offers insight into contemporary landscape studies, geographers working as artists, conversations in geohumanities, discussions about affective relationship in place, responses to a "scientification" of geographic inquiry, and an ever-evolving number of humanistically-inclined creative methods and methodologies.

Still, and again as the editors and chapter authors point out, despite much evidence about aesthetics having positive capacities to "do work" or "be" politically and ethically charged and productive in the world, aesthetics remain

shrouded in scepticism, viewed and used with some suspicion, sublimated to "the real" and rational. This might be, as many of the chapters allude to, because not enough work or thought has been invested either in taking aesthetics out of abstract and elite spaces or in concretizing ways of understanding and practicing them—dealing with aesthetics, in other words, in close encountered ways. Combatting such pejorative characterizations of aesthetics, authors in the text (notably Millner in Chapter 3, Macpherson with Adams in Chapter 7, Brady in Chapter 9) work to demonstrate how aesthetics are useful in radical pedagogy, in transgressive or radical urban transformation and happenings, and in disrupting or even ameliorating the othering of myriad subjects, ecologies, environments, and sociocultural phenomena.

This text is at its best when empirical examples—as case studies, close readings, reflections on embodied practices, or even creative works themselves—do more than accessorize extended theorizations about aesthetics. When, in other words, the writing and theorizing (and in some cases, images) perform (do!) aesthetic work themselves (here I'm thinking of Riding, Chapter 8). The most significant trouble with the text, though, is this does not happen enough. Despite the editors acknowledging that texts and words can evoke experience, can "enable readers to feel the texture...of encounters...on their pulse and their nervous systems (p.114), and at least one author agreeing that "life will reside in poetry" (p.96), the book is remarkably bereft of innovative textuality, of creative word-work that fulfills the encountering affective objectives to which the book is reaching. I worry this text may not find the affective uptake it deserves amongst geographers because it is not, ultimately, an affective force: instead, the writings all tend

too much toward a fairly formulaic laying out of theories and theorists which, in a well-trodden academic tradition, are then deployed to consider something else.

There might, in other words, have been more aesthetic stuff in this text, stuff doing actual aesthetic work itself. The second biggest challenge of this book is its lack of sustained critical social theorization. At risk of a laundry-list question, where are the Indigenous, queer, anarchist, feminist, radically class-conscious, migrant, racialized, southern-hemisphere artists or theorists in the book? This absence is despite recognition (p. 284) that conversations about aesthetics are haunted by accusations of being distanced from ethical and political concerns, even *re/producing* of social divisions. At its most troubling, for instance, are contributions that use auto-ethnography bereft of critical self-reflection about authorial positionality or chapters that speak universalizingly about entire groups of “people” without any kind of observations about race, class, gender, or physical dis/ability. Many of the chapters offer no insight into the socio-cultural positioning of the artists or creative practitioners being discussed. This is a missed opportunity.

It is true, as the editors note more than once, that *Geographical Aesthetics* is a beginning, a start. I also understand no one text can do everything, for everyone. What this text might MOST effectively be, then, is a call—an affective force and impassioned appeal—to rouse and provoke even more geographers to grapple further with, and take much more seriously, the extraordinary potential embodied in all that is aesthetic. Understood that way, I am ultimately thankful for the book and its authors.

Review by Owen Dwyer, Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis

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Hawkins and Straughan’s edited collection, *Geographical Aesthetics*, places several aspects of contemporary cartography into sharp, refreshing relief. While maps and mapmaking are not the primary subject of any chapter in this volume, the collection’s shared aim of calling attention to the role of affect and sensibility highlight the new, refreshing possibilities roiling contemporary cartography. In a manner that recalls earlier efforts to unseat conventional cartographic thinking about mapmaking—recall the wrenching paradigmatic shift from map-as-communication-channel toward the possibility of a critical politics of the mapping endeavour—the authors and editors of *Geographical Aesthetics* encourage their readers to embrace methods that foreground the distinctly lived, practiced, and performative aspects of space and subjectivity.

The collection itself—12 topically diverse chapters, summed and placed in context by the editors’ generous, capable commentary—emerged from an ongoing conversation among scientists, artists, and scholars about the place of ambiguity and sensation in geography’s episteme and methods. The volume’s chapters demonstrate methods and approaches well established in the arts and humanities but perhaps less familiar among social scientists. Chapters range across topics from embodied accounts of printmaking to post-phenomenological perspectives on landscape photography. Seeking reanimated investigations with space and subjectivity, the authors valorize moments—awkward gestures, hesitant

glances, stubborn inarticulateness—commonly overlooked by well-established analytic frames of political economy, neoclassical spatial analysis, and symbolic-discursive interpretation.

In parallel with this prying open of disciplinary space for a careful consideration of the performative and not-just-representational, cartography is witnessing a multiplication of perspectives from/through which to examine mapping. The movement is on display wherever cartographers gather in print and person. Along these lines, two points of contact between the edited collection and cartography strike me as particularly germane.

First, the collection aims to loosen the hold of connoisseurship over aesthetic considerations. Art historical notions of connoisseurship have been the grounds on which aesthetics and cartography traditionally meet. In a manner reminiscent of the shift in the meaning of “culture” among social theorists a generation ago, the editors and authors urge the adoption of a broader, more processual consideration of aesthetics. In place of aesthetics-as-intrinsic-judgment, they recommend an understanding of aesthetics as the imagination and sensibility that animates spatial subjectivities. In the context of cartographic practice and criticism, this kind of revised consideration of aesthetics suggests the need to examine the longstanding notion of the “cartographic eye.” For instance—and here I confess my own persnickety fascination with collecting—map aficionados commonly describe their passion in terms associated with taste, discretion, and informed judgment. Likewise, budding cartophiliacs in my seminar and studio deploy the terms “should” and “like” as if marking the boundaries of their territory. Full-blown cartographic

connoisseurship—*mea culpa!*—boasts densely nested categories of subjects and types, indices and cross-referencing. The chapters in *Geographical Aesthetics* shine a light on these passions, disclosing the emotional economy of pleasurable pain associated with exhaustion and intricacy of a Linnaean sort. Clearly, the revised understanding of aesthetics put forward in this volume calls into question the traditional socio-spatial monopoly of the cognoscente over map room, studio, and seminar. Making space in cartography for the ingénue is a matter of signal importance in a field clearly in need of diversification and adaptability. To its credit, *Geographical Aesthetics* does not denigrate fetish-style connoisseurship. Rather, it domesticates it, insisting that space be accorded other versions of aesthetics, ones that feature intuition, iteration, and multiple modalities of knowing.

A second theme animating the collection is the authors’ identification of new and multiple moments in the production of spaces and subjectivities. They share a desire to undermine the deference accorded artists and traditional media as the solitary generative locus. This challenge to authorial monopoly resonates with the current do-it-yourself moment in cartography. The field’s trending adjectives—cue the word-cloud: participatory, user-defined, interactive, hacked, exploratory, democratic—suggest a stirring transformation in both the political economy and imagination of mapmaking that far exceeds the discipline’s traditional remit. Numerous public institutions and private enterprises engage their constituency-clientele-audience-consumer-producer-users with a multitude of internet-based mapping applications. Citizen mappers, super-users, and not-so-remote sensors abound.

One result of this breathtaking migration of authority from cartographic-priesthood to handheld expert-system is the thorough dismantling of the hoary distinction between mapmaker and map-reader. This blurring of roles and boundaries—imagine: cartography without cartographers—is reminiscent of the dismantling of the “fourth wall” separating art from audience in galleries and theatres. Abandoning the stage in favour of a decidedly serious mingling among the audience, artists and scientists of an aesthetic bent actively breach the fourth wall by adopting participatory methods. They do so with interfaces for the exchange of new data, collaborative insights, and pervasive feedback. The visualizations generated by these expert-systems and super-user cartographic software present a remarkable challenge to the time-hallowed notion of a map arriving in the hands of its (passive, receptive, grateful) audience fully formed, sprung from the brow of Zeus. In the place once occupied by this kind of authoritarian stability, daily cartographic practice now seeks out originary encounters between so-called producer and consumer. The result is a kind of cartographic theatre or happening—think: hacker lab, coding academy, and developer meetup—that embraces a relational aesthetic of production, complete with the concerns that accompany the commercialization of the art world’s version of a relational aesthetic.

In this more far-reaching understanding of aesthetics, cartographic practice benefits from flexible disciplinary boundaries and the suspension of categorical imperatives. A semblance of this willingness to displace formal notions (“Yes, but is it a map?”) animates, for instance, the changing conversation about what constitutes a “map.” The traditional

linear definition of the term as a graphical representation of earth’s surface now finds itself accompanied by a rich conversation about map-ness and contextual resemblance. Understood as a category space in which maps vary in terms of extent, e.g., micro to macro, and degree of abstraction, e.g., photo realistic to conceptual diagrams, this multidimensional understanding of “map” is suggestive of Cubism’s facets and frontiers: familiar yet capable of surprise and wonder. Naked, careless of pretension, the map simultaneously occupies all steps along the categorical staircase, its descent expressive of a subject animated by a fluid, processual understanding of space and its co-constituents.

Review by Geraldine Pratt, The University of British Columbia

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Geographical Aesthetics aims to reinvigorate the discussion of geography and aesthetics, in the first instance by uncovering and celebrating the discipline’s long history of aesthetic inquiry—from Humboldt, through humanistic geography, to non-representational theory (among other contributions and traditions). Going forward, the editors insist on the need to hold in creative tension two distinctive meanings of aesthetics— aesthetics as codified principles of beauty often associated with artistic practice, and a more everyday expansive sense of aesthetics as embodied sense perception. The editors have collected 12 papers that speak eloquently to disparate themes and issues (from the photomontage of Beate Gütschow to the connoisseurship of breeding beef cattle and sheep) within a wide range of social and aesthetic theories (e.g., Rancière, Foucault, Lacan, Michael Fried, T. J. Clark).

In expansive introductions to the three sections of the book, the editors give the reader some broader questions to chew on as they move through these disparate chapters. What is geographical about aesthetics (and what might geography and geographical thought bring to aesthetic theory)? What do art and other aesthetic practices bring to geography and the worlds we inhabit? Answers to these questions are peppered through the book. For instance, the editors and authors make clear how spatialities such as depth and surface, distance and proximity run through aesthetic thought and practice, and are being reimagined in creative ways so as to allow us to reconceive relations between human and nonhuman, passivity and agency, interiority and exteriority. A good number of chapters explore how artistic practices and pedagogies function as forms of critique, provocative sites of encounter, and spaces in which to intuit new modes of co-existence and as yet unimagined futures. Attending to aesthetics, the editors argue, invites more embodied methodologies and experiments in writing and other modes of scholarly work.

■ This book is a generous invitation to think more deeply about and experiment with aesthetics. An affirmative sociability runs throughout, evident even in the tone of critique in many of the chapters. The chapters by Alex Vasudevan and Naomi Millner stand out as models of positive engaged critique. Millner, for example, carefully shifts through various criticisms of claims regarding the significance of affect for emancipatory politics, claims that she herself wants to make in relation to No Borders' activist pedagogy. Rather than dismissing these criticisms, Millner works with them very closely to make a more refined and convincing argument about geographies of activism and affect. At the same time, the emphasis in many of

the chapters on affirmative sociality, tolerance, inclusivity, and collective solidarity, did make me yearn to hear more about dissensus, conflict, and disruption. Which is not to say that this kind of discussion is totally absent—Deborah Dixon, for instance, examines how renderings of the figure of a frog in scientific drawings in the nineteenth century both instantiated racial hierarchy and in some instances functioned as subtle critique of the commodification of animals, and Ashley Dawkins and Alex Loftus in their chapter discuss the urban interventions of the art collective, Temporary Services. Even so, I would say that the weight of the book leans more towards consensus than dissent.

So too, although the book and individual chapters certainly are not guilty of universalizing the sensing body (there are, for example, excellent chapters on disability art, and on anime and cosplay), my overall impression is that in the bulk of the book Anglo-European bodies and cultures (possibly white and middle class—this is less clearly marked) get most of the attention. As I read this book, I thought of the work of Dana Claxton, a Lakota artist based in Vancouver, who is reclaiming and reworking the concept of beauty through the notion of indigenous gorgeous, as an act of resistance to the brutal dehumanization of indigenous peoples in North America. I thought of the Filipino performance practice of spectacular, improvised over-the-top dramatics, a form known as *puro arte*, which has emerged within and sometimes against a history of US-Philippine colonial relations. As geographers we are exceedingly well placed to tell these stories about diverse historical geographies of aesthetics. Recognizing that one book cannot do everything, I suggest this too could be added to the editors' already broad invitational agenda.

I wonder if there are other ways that the editors might further push their agenda, and I can see the resources for doing so within their book. It seems to me to be such an exciting and oddly permissive moment for experimenting with performative writing and other forms of creative scholarly practice and production, such as films, and public performance. The terms geopoetics and creative non-fiction seem to gesture to only a fragment of this experimentation and I wonder if we might think more deeply and broadly about the embrace of artistic form. Allan Pred, of course, was an early experimenter with montage in geography. Reading Vasudevan's piece, I wondered about allegory as a mode of academic thinking and writing: what this might look like and where it might get us. Further, where does a discussion of aesthetics and writing begin and end? Surely scientific writing has an aesthetic and owning up to that might open the door even further for other kinds of experimentation. It seems to me that these are discussions that we should have, and this book sets us on a path to have them.

Review by Arun Saldanha, University of Minnesota

The jolt of art

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There is an intrinsic connection between geography and art. This collection is a wonderful and necessary celebration as well as explanation of that connection. Its introduction and conclusion cite an earlier commentary of mine in *Dialogue in Human Geography* (Saldanha 2012) where I criticized the sentiment that an aesthetic turn in geography would be

something new. I argued that there is, on the contrary, a prevalent "aestheticism" in our discipline today, using that term in its common usage as pertaining to the valuation of art over politics and practicality. I stand by that critique after the appearance of this book. Though it explicitly addresses politics where most of the recent forays into aesthetics in our discipline have shunned doing so, it still assumes that it has to retrieve and defend art against a general dismissal. If aesthetics is, as this book suggests, the conceptual exploration of the human experience of art, I cannot recall a geographer ever dismissing or maligning it. From German Idealism, Alexander Humboldt, and the *Annales* school of geohistory, to humanistic geography, landscape studies, nonrepresentational theory, and some feminist geography and geovisualization, art has for a long time been enthusiastically embraced in the discipline. These currents have been correct, moreover, in questioning the dominance of another intrinsic bedfellow of geography, namely science. Geographical aesthetics comes in waves, and this book is at the crest of the latest of such waves.

What I argue *is* dismissed and maligned in geography, is not art as such, but the intensity that is proper to it. In much geographical writing it is as if art is ontologically indistinguishable from the flows of "everyday life," as if it emerges without trouble or pain and without disturbing the world from which it springs. In line with many recent versions of vitalism, art is theorized as one more expression of universal life gently peeking through the cracks of human exceptionalism. There is nothing incongruous, no leap or violence, no existential uncertainty, and especially no injustice or contestation. Art is life, life is art, more need not be known. To put it colloquially, or cynically, but also quite precisely,

such vitalism is *touchy-feely*. The erstwhile humanism of phenomenologically inspired geography merely returns in this “quotidianized” vitalism in the guise of a pre-established harmony between art and body, individual and society, and the human species and the rest of the planet. If Darwin’s revolutionary idea is that life does not abide by such pre-established harmony but is instead dominated by a ruthlessly aleatory principle, this touchy-feely vitalism is resolutely anti-Darwinian. And if the revolutionary idea of Marx and of feminism is that no human experience is untouched by power games, perhaps especially not art and everyday life, this vitalism is also resolutely anti-Marxist and antifeminist.

Geographical aesthetics then risks missing out on *the most obvious intensities* of the world from which it springs, which today are the multiple crises and injustices of the capitalist world-system. Unlike so many who cite them in geography, Deleuze and Guattari on their own admission remained Marxists of a certain kind (see Deleuze 1997, 171). When it comes to the practices and sensations of art, they emphasized its fundamentally disturbing and dissonant qualities. What fascinates Deleuze in a painter like Francis Bacon, a playwright like Antonin Artaud, or an author like William S. Burroughs is the *struggle* which producing their art entailed and which continues in how the art makes an impact (see Deleuze 2003). Art is pain, trickery, and combat *before* it is joyful. Deleuze does not call for some dark and melancholic Romanticism, but for understanding of the complex layering of affect. Though *Geographical Aesthetics* sometimes gestures towards this essentially problematic nature of the artistic process, on the whole it shies away from making it as central as

Deleuze and Guattari do, and as the crises of capitalism demand we continue doing.

Geo-aesthetics should not be a de-intensification of the creative act and of the *geo* in which that act attempts to intervene. As the earth becomes ever more crisis-prone, geo-aesthetics has to beware of falling into the aestheticist trap: a beautiful soul contemplating a pre-established harmony of life and art. Furthermore, with Badiou (2009) and against situationism, I make a strict distinction between art, science, politics, and love. Each is a practice with its own way of constructing truths. Aesthetics cannot claim to supplant the patient activism and street protest necessary for actually overthrowing the world-system. What it can do, is appreciate the jolt that is proper to art.

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- Review by Gwilym Eades, Royal Holloway, University of London**

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Geographical Aesthetics is a handbook of qualitative and participatory research that delves deep into questions of

ontology, subjectivity, and art. Hawkins and Straughan's *Introduction* and section-leading essays are excellent, and are filled with insight into new theories and practices for making and experiencing art. These are, quite simply, blurring all expectations, and indeed distinctions, between inside and outside (e.g., of galleries), production and consumption, and the gazes and feelings that both construct and experience increasingly sophisticated and performative art-worlds.

Though not always explicit, the political-aesthetic philosophies of Rancière would seem to underlie or inform much of at least the first half of the book (if not the whole of it). The idea of an "emancipated spectator" counter-maps externalist readings of art as simply performance on the one hand, adding, on the other, the perspective of "other" senses including "inner touch." The latter is postulated to be what it means to experience art "from within" and to begin to theorize what it could possibly mean to do so.

The strength of this book is that it does not reside exclusively in theoretical domains. Each chapter, even the rigorously theoretical and Marxist one by Dawkins and Loftus, brings in real-world examples to illuminate the theories put forward. In this chapter, for example, relational aesthetics are critiqued using evidence from a Chicago-based collective called Temporary Services. This collective created a sort of participatory art space allowing passers-by to construct surrealistic and/or ephemeral works to comment on the idea of the empty lot. This was then tied into theories of space and class in America.

An early criticism of this volume came to mind as I was frustrated by some missing references in the Dawkins and Loftus chapter. This is the problem of quick turn-around times

in publishing that sometimes result in what appears to be slap-dash thinking. However, it is difficult here to fully disentangle the fact that much of this thinking appears at the bleeding/leading edge of change in avant-garde art theory, from the fact that timing is everything in publishing in academia. If one waits too long to produce the perfectly edited volume one might find that the state of play has moved on in the meantime.

With this said, the volume as a whole, as well as in its parts, is anything but slap-dash. The selection of both scholars and subjects for inclusion here is stellar. The sequencing of thoughts in the introductory essays and in the substantive chapters is exemplary, and could be used as a model of best practice for edited volumes (and their editors) everywhere.

Overwhelmingly, one should take from this volume a new appreciation for the aesthetic in geography. This includes (excitingly for this reviewer) observations about mapping, philosophy, qualitative methods, performance, and good old art. One could, after reading *Geographical Aesthetics*, go to the Tate and view the Turners with a fresh eye and renewed sense of appreciation. Therefore, the insights of this volume are not simply the area of a self-selected elite of avant-garde theorists. They are those of a set of highly trained scholars with years of experience experiencing, theorizing, and writing about (not to mention making) art, both in its everyday particulars and as a whole field.

We have here, brought together in one volume, chapters by emerging (McNally) as well as established (della Dora) scholars; by theorists and practitioners; by artists and scholars of art. We thus have, additionally, a useful set of tools for coming to grips with the state of play in spatial, geovisual, participatory, geographical, and site-specific art-worlds.

Della Dora, Hawkins, McNally, Dawkins, Loftus, and Adey (whose review of the book appears on the back) all have (or have had recent) connections to the social and cultural geographies (SCG) research group at Royal Holloway, University of London. This is a glowing recommendation in itself and the SCG research group has demonstrated itself to be a leader in the field of cultural geography. The present volume will only help to cement that reputation.

More important, however, than the reputational value of the volume is that alluded to above, namely, the practical value of the tools presented here. One could as easily now view “traditional” paintings in a gallery with a renewed sense of appreciation and a critical eye as one could pass by an empty lot and be able with more felicity and power construct a thought about the relationality and politics of space itself.

Auto-ethnography and video work make appearances here, and we have excellent black and white reproductions as well as textual “snapshots” of works in progress to aid in our apprehension of the work at hand. In the second half of the volume we begin to see a recurrence of themes around landscape, photography, and the image. Here we begin to experience the influence of another “ghost in the machine” of this book, namely Cosgrove. Indeed, several of these chapters refer explicitly to early works by Cosgrove (and Daniels). We can see again how very influential and important that early work was, and still is.

We also have a very nuanced presentation of the old idea of “positionalities” here, and this shows how very sophisticated *Geographical Aesthetics* is in terms of qualitative methods. The chapter on biostratigraphy and disability art is a case in point. There is a careful balance of interest

demonstrated through inclusion of sites of art practice that include, paradoxically, those without the ability to experience art in all its (literal) senses. Compensating factors in theory mean the inclusion of such sites in the re-mapping *Geographical Aesthetics* envisions.

In short, *Geographical Aesthetics* succeeds on many levels, including the theoretical, the qualitative, and the practical. It is recommended very highly for artists, libraries, geographers, and indeed anyone interested in aesthetics and space in general. It will speak especially to those seeking a state-of-the-art guide to new aesthetic theory and how it plays out in a wide range of spaces in the contemporary world.

***Response by Harriet Hawkins, Royal Holloway,
University of London and Elizabeth R. Straughan,
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Re-Imagining Aesthetics, a response

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It can feel like the spaces and practices of scholarship are never as much ones of reading and writing, debate and exchange as it might be imagined or as we might wish, so it really is a wonderful honour when colleagues and friends expend precious time, organizing, reading, and writing responses to an edited text, whose preparation was, in turn, the result of the contributing scholars’ generosity and patience. We want to begin our comments then with thanks to the authors who wrote for the book, to Paul Kingsbury for curating this written forum and the panel it is based on, and to our readers whose comments reflect the spirit and patient concern of critical

friends—at once expansively generous yet knowing how to probe weak spots in a productive way.

By way of a response we want to take forward three sets of imaginaries about aesthetics that seemed to run throughout the responses. We think here of imaginaries because this seems an apt way to embrace how aesthetics works on body and mind, and also to retain an appreciation of how it goes to work in the world. The first concerns “tensions”; the second concerns “difference, dissensus, and disruption”; and the third “doings.”

Tensions

On coming back to book in the light of this forum we had to resist the temptation to rewrite it, to predict what might have been considered to be left out, to become apologist for its overlookings. In this case, the driving force behind the book gives us a rather useful get out clause, we were less concerned to promote a singular disciplinary definition of aesthetics and what it could do, rather we sought to engage aesthetics through a series of tensions that offered provocative invitations to think and to feel. Gratifyingly this invitation seemed a provocative one, and so running through the responses here are the vibrant tensions we found so central to aesthetics, around politics, around mind and body, around art and the everyday. We want to dwell here a little more on the latter.

Before we knew exactly what the book was, we knew for sure what it was not: a book about art, although to conceive of a book about geographical aesthetics without any discussion of art would be a little odd. As we watched aesthetics become a more recognised force in geography over the five years of the book’s production what we saw was far from a narrowing of

focus, far from a disciplinary falling in line behind singular understandings, but rather an enchanting theoretical and empirical pluralism that continues to proliferate in geographical discussions of aesthetics today. This liveliness became the book’s framing and while it felt at times like we were failing by not committing to the pursuit of a singular theoretical perspective—and perhaps for some of our readers, that is what they would have preferred to see[0]—our decision was reinforced by those many thinkers of aesthetics within and beyond geography for whom aesthetics refuses to settle out. Not least of all is Immanuel Kant whose aesthetics are shaped by a wrenching duality, an almost terminal inconsistency between aesthetics as the culturally codified conventions—of beauty or the sublime—by which we judge, cognitively assess, a range of arts and cultural practices; and aesthetics as the sensuous explorations of subjects, bodies, and spaces that are in excess of rational thought.

We were committed to an expanded aesthetics that took in those practices, both aesthetics associated with the everyday, the non-specialist and utterly ordinary, as well as studios, galleries, and concert halls. What Aitken’s comments around play as an ordinary aesthetics throw into relief however, is that despite our efforts to presence an expanded aesthetics, the theorizations of what aesthetics does and enables that dominates is drawn from art theoretical and historical perspectives. Aitken’s assertion of the possibilities of play signals a clear alternative and one that we would urge future geographical discussions of aesthetics to expand on as a framing.

Difference, dissensus, disruption

Difference, dissensus, and disruption, three sets of imaginaries that ran throughout the commentary, and three sets of ideas that pivot on a critique of aesthetic encounters imagined in terms of coming together, in terms of commonality, a sensibility that seemed to unite the spectrum of authors the volume collected. What is clearly problematic about this is that it serves to reproduce dominant framings, so the book is guilty of largely reproducing aesthetics through Anglo-American frameworks, and being less attentive to difference than it might have been. While there are case studies that take us empirically outside of this geographic frame, Kingsbury's work on anime and cosplay for example, as both Pratt and De Leeuw note more space could have been made for aesthetic theorizations that hail from other perspectives.

To turn to the latter two of these terms, dissensus and disruption, we would offer two reflections. Firstly, we do agree that the force of aesthetics can lie in these formulations (Rancierian dissensus and its greater presence in Geography would be one of the dimensions we would enhance if we were to re-do the book). Indeed we would contend that there are places within the text where just such a force produces change in the world. We would, however, want to make space for other ways aesthetics can go to work, or to the other forms and scales of disruption that do critical work. Linked to this we wonder secondly, whether there is a way to texture some of this vocabulary. We, of course, get behind art as a jolt, together with other related imaginaries—as a shock to thought, for example, as an electrifying zig and zag (Massumi 2005; O'Sullivan and Zepke 2008)—that channel the forcefulness and intensities that characterize Deleuze and Guattari's writings about art and affect that seem to influence Saldanha's

critique here. We can appreciate how large and important political projects often require imaginaries cast in terms of disruptions, ruptures, and overthrowings. We are drawn, however, to seek relations between aesthetics and politics that find forms other than such muscular assertions of force and power. Turning to Deleuze and Guattari, alone and together, we offer three brief illustrations of what such other imaginaries of aesthetics might look like. Firstly, aesthetics is central to the “menagerie” that populates Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*. While we might think of the poster fish whose shock and awe tactics are akin to the jolt, there are also a host of other non-human aesthetic practices. The sonorous seductions and visual illusions of the leaf cutting birds for example, offer an aesthetics of desire, an accretive animalistic ritual, reproductive practices driven through aesthetic intensities. Secondly we could look to the biomechanics of sense, and the place of aesthetics within Deleuze's logics of sense, wherein aesthetics is constituted by and registered through incremental molecular movements across concentration gradients. For some this enables us to conceive of aesthetics for bacteria, for us along with Deborah Dixon this formed the basis for an eccentric thought experiment in which we explore aesthetics of living rocks—thrombolites (Dixon et al. 2013). A third form of aesthetics can be found in Guattari's ethico-aesthetic practices. Working with Sallie Marston we have been mobilising Guattari's ideas to make sense of the transversal transdisciplinary practices of an art-science project designed for high school children. Here we explore transversality, after Guattari, as an ethico-aesthetic intervention into the daily practices of institutions that goes to work to remake subjectivities. This is to disrupt, to cut across existing

structures, in this case of disciplines and institutions, but it does so less through a lightening bolt of change, than through incremental, hesitant, often transient practices, marked as much by failure and retreat as by progressive change.

These brief examples seems to us to offer a different register through which to consider the disruption and dissensus aesthetics can make possible. Intensities are present, disruption occurs, but not necessarily through an artfulness valued as a jolt. Perhaps this latter imaginary itself falls to into an aestheticist trap, albeit one of a different form to that romanticised one Saldanha critiques.

Doings

Geography has, of course, long had its own aesthetics and poetics, ones that inhere in maps and diagrams as Dwyer's comments remind us, in the regulatory measure of scientific and social scientific prose, as Pratt notes, as well as the more specific practices of geopoetics and creative practice-based that has come of age within geography of late. Yet the book was not perhaps at its strongest when it came to making space for and showcasing the aesthetic doings of the discipline. This is perhaps a function of the temporalities of the project, for the contemporary intensification of creative practice within the discipline was evolving when the book was conceived in 2009, and is visible in some chapters and is one of the central dimensions of the conclusion. We only have to turn to the practices of the commentators to see the vibrancy and diversity of this work.

Aitken's ethnopoetics (2016) uses a combination of images, poetic text, and dialogue to develop a mode of representation that challenges normative modes of social

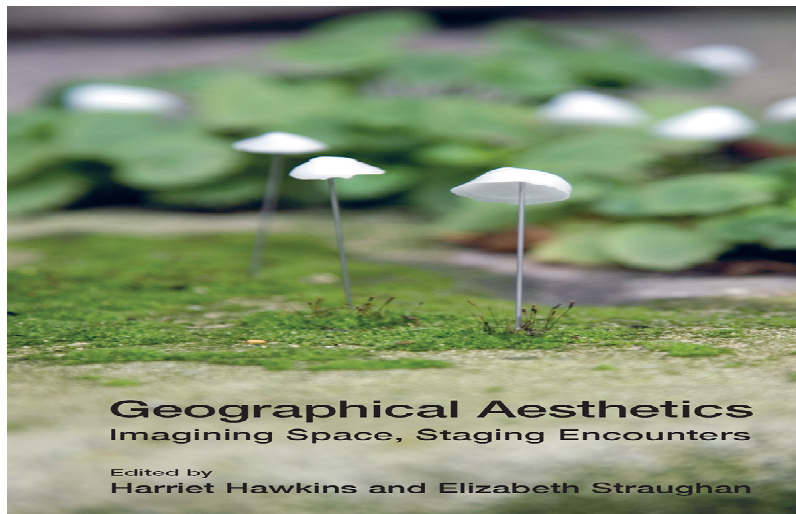
science methods and presentation to engage with non-representational dimensions. Pratt's collaborative testimonial play, Nanay, produced in collaboration with Caleb Johnston (2013), offers us the means to appreciate the potential of aesthetics practices in producing politically engaged creative research and world making with others. De Leeuw's (2013) poetic practices verse a sophisticated environmental politics written through a unique aesthetic that is so remarkably hers. Their linguistic choices and forms skilfully dissect flawed senses of power, masculinity, and race that sit at the heart of both historic and many contemporary environmental aesthetics.

Together this lively cross-section of aesthetic doings leaves us with a renewed sense of the need to do more with the aesthetic doings of geography. To speak and theorize of what it is they might do in the world, but also to appreciate and mobilize geographical aesthetics as a means not only to research but also a force, however that is understood, to re-make the world differently.

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