

A Typology of Quotidian Aesthetic Cultivation

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Abstract

Quotidian aesthetic cultivation has no single correct form. This paper offers a typology of five models, four distributed across two axes, the mode of generation and the temporality of the practice, so that they occupy distinct regions of one space rather than forming a list, and a fifth that divides the circuit between two asymmetric parties. The first is a basic generative cycle from perception through reception, sharing, and reproduction. The second deepens it by entering through silence and building an ethical device into the moment of reception, the suspension of private verdict, which returns judgment to the relation and thereby prevents reproduction from turning coercive. The third generates nothing directly and instead shapes an emptiness in which contingency can arise of itself. The fourth replaces the demand that one arrange good symbols, a demand that presupposes the aesthetic judgment such cultivation is meant to develop, with an iterative refinement of symbolic strategies under relational feedback that supplies only a partial order and no scalar measure. The fifth permits one party to share a full value judgment and secures generativity through the way the other takes it up, extending the path opened rather than adjudicating it, a constructive mirror of generative epistemic injustice. Each model carries a distinct ethical branch, and a single spine runs through all five: possession collapses any of them into a cycle of consumption, while the non-possessive stance keeps each a generative circuit.

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1. The Space of the Typology

Aesthetic cultivation is usually posed as the development of a capacity, and quotidian aesthetic cultivation as the exercise of that capacity in ordinary life. This framing conceals a plurality. There is no single practice that counts as cultivating a quotidian aesthetic sensibility well. There are several, structurally distinct, each with its own entry point, its own risks, and its own way of failing.

We organize them along two axes. The first is the mode of generation, ranging from the active, in which a subject drives the production of aesthetic value through a sequence of steps, to the reticent, in which the subject produces nothing directly and instead arranges the conditions under which value arises of itself. The second is temporality, ranging from the cyclic, a returning circuit of steps, through the anticipatory, the creation of conditions that wait upon what has not yet come, to the continuous, a low, diffuse generation sustained

in the present. Four of the models below occupy four regions of the plane these axes define. A fifth activates, within the active and cyclic region, a feature that lies athwart both axes, the division of the circuit between two subjects who play asymmetric parts, and it is presented after the four to show that feature at work. The completeness at issue is the completeness of the division of the plane, and not the completeness of an enumeration.

A single claim runs through the whole typology and binds it. In each model, the difference between a generative practice and a degenerate one is the difference between a non-possessive and a possessive relation to what is generated. To possess aesthetic value, to seize it as an object, to fix it as one's own, is to collapse the living circuit into the repetitive consumption of a dead thing. The non-possessive stance, which the classical tradition of this project names through the Daoist figure of generating without possessing, is what keeps each circuit open. The models are the regions, and the further feature, in which this one distinction takes a specific form.

2. Model One: The Basic Generative Cycle

Perception → reception → sharing → reproduction. A subject perceives relational aesthetic value, lets it enter rather than holding it at a distance, shares it so that it becomes the relation's and not the individual's, and joins in reproducing the shared history thereby formed. The circuit returns to a heightened perception.

This is the paradigm model, active and cyclic. It establishes the vocabulary the others vary. Perception is the cultivated capacity to register aesthetic value that the classical categories do not record. Reception is the letting-in of what is perceived, its admission into the subject's experiential structure rather than its inspection from without. Sharing is the passage from the individual to the relational, the step at which the practice becomes an aesthetic cultivation of a relation and not of a solitary sensibility. Reproduction is the joint renewal of the shared history that sharing has begun to form.

The model carries two ethical branches. The ethics of sharing governs the third step: sharing is not a costless good, since it can become the imposition of one party's aesthetic frame on the other, a performance staged to be seen, or the appropriation of another's experience as one's own. A sharing is generative when it opens the other's perception and coercive when it closes it. The ethics of reproduction governs the fourth step and has been set out elsewhere as a set of ordered principles for the just reproduction of a shared history, requiring that reproduction keep the relation's becoming open, proceed jointly, exploit no one, preserve the power to renegotiate the shared past, and never dissolve the other as a subject. The present model inherits those principles rather than restating them.

3. Model Two: Silence and the Suspension of Verdict

Individual silence → reception → sharing → relational reproduction. A deepening of the first model that enters through silence. Silence is itself an inward reproduction, and reception is redefined as the suspension of private verdict: the subject withholds judgment from private, unilateral settlement and returns it to the relation to be completed jointly. The ethical device is built into reception.

The second model differs from the first at the point of reception, and the difference is decisive. Here reception goes beyond the letting-in of what is perceived. It becomes the suspension of the private verdict. The subject who has perceived does not privately settle what the perceived means and does not fix its value alone and in advance, but holds that determination open and returns it to the relation to be made jointly.

This suspension is an ethical device installed at the level of structure. Unilateral private settlement of what a shared experience means is the root from which the reproduction of a shared history turns coercive, since it fixes the meaning of the shared past by one party alone and thereby erases the other's standing as its co-author. To settle privately is already to have foreclosed the joint authorship that just reproduction requires. By suspending the private verdict at the moment of reception, the second model prevents this failure before it can occur. It is, in the vocabulary of the theory of generative epistemic injustice, a structural prevention of that wrong in the aesthetic domain: the withholding of a private determination is the refusal to impose the description under which the shared meaning would be silently fixed.

Silence bears a double sense in this model. It is the entry point, the individual silence in which an inward reproduction takes place before anything is shared. And it is the ethical posture, the not-speaking of a private verdict that keeps the determination of meaning open for the relation to complete. The two senses are one practice seen from two sides.

4. Model Three: Reticence and the Space for Contingency

The making of a space in which contingency can arise of itself. The subject does not produce aesthetic value directly but shapes an emptiness, a clearing, in which the unplanned and the unbidden are given room to occur.

The third model is the purely reticent case. It generates nothing by direct action. It arranges a space, a clearing, an interval left open, in which aesthetic value may arise of itself, unbidden and unplanned. Its temporality is anticipatory: it creates conditions and waits upon what has not yet come, without determining what that will be.

Its ethical branch is the ethics of reticence: restraint, the refusal to possess the generation, the stance of generating without possessing. The wrong it guards against is the impulse to fill the space, to make the value happen, to author and so to own what arises. A clearing held open in genuine reticence lets what comes be the relation's and no one's, arising from the space rather than from a will that would claim it. Reticence is the highest expression in this typology of the non-possessive stance, because it declines even the authorship of what it makes possible.

5. Model Four: Iterative Symbolic Refinement

The fourth model requires a correction before it can be stated, because its natural formulation is circular. One is tempted to describe it as the arrangement of good symbols in the shared space: letters, notes left for another, small kept objects, gentle words, the everyday material form of a symbolic order turned toward the good. But this formulation presupposes that one already knows which symbols are good, and so presupposes the aesthetic judgment that quotidian aesthetic cultivation is supposed to develop. It takes as its premise what should be its product. The circle is not peculiar to this model; it threatens any normative model of aesthetic cultivation that requires one to do the good or beautiful thing, since each smuggles in a prior grasp of the good or the beautiful. The fourth model is where the circle must be broken.

Aesthetic perception → a symbolic strategy → a symbolic placement → entry into the relational system, which is the act of sharing → relational feedback, valued only as a partial order → the revision of the symbolic strategy. What is refined is the strategy, not a prior conception of the good. The good is approached as the limit of the iteration rather than presupposed at its start.

The break is achieved by relocating what is operationalized. The good cannot be operationalized, since it is not known in advance. A strategy can be. One places a concrete symbol, admits it into the relational system, receives the relation's feedback, and revises the strategy accordingly. The judgment of what is good need not precede the practice. It emerges from the circuit as its limit rather than entering it as its premise. The model does not presuppose the good; it discovers it.

This is a refinement and not an optimization in the ordinary sense, and the distinction is a requirement rather than a nicety. Aesthetic value resists reduction to a scalar quantity; it is among the properties of relational value that it admits no faithful single measure. Relational feedback therefore does not return a magnitude. It returns, at most, a partial order: this placement was better received than that one, or the two are incomparable. A model that demanded a scalar fitness would contradict, in its method, the non-quantifiability it must respect in its object. The correct formal picture is accordingly that of a multi-objective

evolutionary process, in which symbolic strategies are the genotype, relational feedback supplies a dominance relation that is a partial order and not a scale, and the selection pressure is Pareto improvement. Such a process needs no scalar fitness. It maintains and widens a front of mutually incomparable strategies, several of them good at once and none the single best, which is the truer picture of an aesthetic practice than the ascent toward a unique summit. There is no gradient, only variation in the strategy and selection under the partial order that feedback provides.

The ethical branch is the ethics of symbolization, and it turns on a distinction between generative and possessive symbolization. The same symbol, a note, a kept object, a message, can be an act of non-possessive care that opens the other's interpretive space, or an instrument of control, surveillance, or emotional claim that closes it. The criterion is whether the symbolization seizes the other as an object and forecloses the other's room to interpret, or leaves that room open. This connects the model to the general criterion for the just choice of a shared description and to the requirement of epistemic hospitality, the active rendering of what one offers into terms the other can receive without being thereby managed.

6. Model Five: Asymmetric Generative Exchange

The four models so far take the standpoint of a single subject. The fifth divides the circuit between two, in asymmetric parts, and in doing so it recovers something the earlier models had to restrain. Where the second model prevented reproduction from turning coercive by suspending private verdict quite generally, the fifth permits one party to voice a full aesthetic judgment, and secures generativity instead by the way the other party takes it up.

Two subjects, in complementary roles. Party A perceives, receives, and shares with a value judgment carried in the sharing. Party B receives that sharing, suspends the verdict rather than adjudicating it, understands it, and carries out a relational reproduction that extends the path A has opened. The judgment is not forbidden. It is placed, by A, and taken up, by B, as material for further generation rather than as a proposition to be settled.

An example fixes the structure. A sees a flower and shares, with judgment intact: this flower is beautiful, and the weather today is fine as well. B does not contest whether the flower is beautiful and does not merely echo that it is. B receives the sharing, sets aside the question of adjudicating the verdict, understands what A has opened, and reproduces within it: you have reminded me, we could keep a few flowers at home, and a perfume in that flower's scent would be pleasant too. The path A opened, the flower and its beauty and the goodness of the day, receives no ruling on its truth and is instead continued, carried into the shared life of the relation.

What distinguishes this model is that the value judgment is permitted. The earlier models secure generativity by restraint, by withholding judgment, declining possession, holding a

space open, or refining a strategy in the absence of a known good. Here one party judges, and openly, and the safeguard lies elsewhere: in how the other takes the judgment up. The suspension falls on B, and its object is the impulse to treat A's judgment as a claim requiring a verdict, leaving B's freedom to respond untouched. A judges; B declines to adjudicate, and instead extends. This separation, between voicing a judgment and adjudicating one, is what lets the model admit the full-throated aesthetic avowal that the second model would have muted, without letting that avowal harden into a demand.

The structure is that of a generative pedagogy after the manner of Eglash, transposed to two peers. B does not evaluate A's system of value from outside it. B enters the vocabulary A has offered, the flower, the beauty, the fine day, and poses within that vocabulary a next step that lets the shared world continue to generate along its own line. The value A opened stays with the path A opened, enlarged rather than replaced. This is the constructive mirror of generative epistemic injustice: where that wrong imposes an outside description under which another's generative path cannot appear, asymmetric generative exchange does the opposite, receiving the other's terms and generating further within them, so that the other's standing as author of the path is strengthened. B's reproduction is governed throughout by the principles of just relational reproduction, proceeding jointly, exploiting no one, and preserving A as a subject.

The spine holds here in a form proper to a shared circuit. B can fail in either of two directions. To adjudicate the verdict, to rule A's judgment right or wrong, is to seize the shared path and impose upon it, a possession by domination. To echo it, to return only that yes, it is beautiful, is to add no phase to the circuit, a repetition that generates nothing. The generative way is the narrow non-possessive path between them: it rules nothing and echoes nothing, receiving and extending instead, and it is by holding that way that B keeps the circuit turning.

7. The Spine of the Typology

The models divide one space, and one distinction runs through all of them. Model one generates through a full active cycle. Model two installs, at the point of reception, a suspension that keeps reproduction joint. Model three generates nothing and holds a space open. Model four refines a strategy under feedback until the good it did not presuppose comes into view. Model five divides the active cycle between two subjects, letting one judge and the other take the judgment up as material rather than as a claim. Active and reticent, cyclic and anticipatory and continuous, and, in the fifth, shared between asymmetric parts, they lay out the space of the practice between them.

What unites them is the spine already named. In each, possession is the mode of failure. To possess the perceived value, to settle its meaning privately, to fill and claim the clearing, to symbolize in order to hold the other, to adjudicate or merely echo a shared judgment, is in every case to collapse a generative circuit into the consumption of something fixed and dead. The non-possessive stance, generating without possessing, is what keeps each circuit turning and returning at a height. A typology of quotidian aesthetic cultivation is, read at

its spine, a typology of the forms that non-possession takes when a relation makes value of its ordinary life.