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The Sense of Earthiness: Everyday Aesthetics

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A woman, a mare, a lyre and a vase are the examples chosen by Hippias Major to reply to Socrates' questions on beauty. The conceptual debate around aesthetics started precisely from there, by considering concrete things, creatures and events that we encounter in everyday life. The joy and comfort we obtain from a lively tune, a warm meal, an unexpected arrangement of colours or a soft texture are experiences that have tuned our sensibility through innumerable generations. These simple aspects of life are the loyal companions and sources of the quiet or excited pleasure that we experience during our fleeting existence. Perhaps this is the reason why Western aesthetic theory has taken them so much for granted and focused instead on the extraordinariness of great art and stunning beauty. But let us go back and reconsider these very basics of aesthetics since they incorporate key aspects that are crucial to our understanding of human sensibility.

In this paper we will examine the most down-to-earth of items, those that lack any of the qualities traditionally related to the aesthetic: that is, they are not original, creative or elaborate and are not particularly elegant, ornamental or graceful. Items of this nature do not conform to any models of art and beauty or to the consensual requirements necessary for objects to be deemed aesthetic, such as being formally stimulating, expressive or manifesting syntactic and semantic complexity. The objects I am referring to are absolutely prosaic, yet are still capable of inducing a deep aesthetic response akin to that conveyed by objects traditionally regarded as being aesthetic. This might be a difficult case to argue, were it not for a property that is still worthy of regard, despite having been entirely ignored by aesthetic theory. This property may be identified as 'earthiness' or the 'telluric dimension', a sensuous and symbolic celebration of sheer materiality in everyday life.

I will analyse previous attempts at examining everyday objects, qualities or behaviours that are related to earthiness, and situate the telluric within its proper experiential context to describe how it affects us aesthetically.

1. Everyday objects, qualities, behaviours: three art-centric approaches

Western aesthetics has traditionally focused on artworks and, more recently, on nature expressed in landscapes and gardens as a source of aesthetic delight. Attempts to include non-natural and

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non-artistic objects in Western aesthetic theory are very few. John Dewey stands out as one who did consider such objects and situations to have aesthetic relevance. Although he did not fully develop his inquiry into an everyday aesthetics, he was a forerunner in opening up aesthetic discussion to include non-conventional items. Among innumerable examples taken from daily life, he mentions that 'drinking tea from a cup' implies also 'enjoying the cup's shape and delicacy of its material', and takes into account things that 'have the most vitality for the average person' even if that person 'does not take them to be arts; for instance, the movie, jazzed music, the comic strip, and too frequently, newspaper accounts of lovenests, murders and exploits of bandits' (Dewey 1980: 261, 5-6) Half a century later, a few monographs have been published within Anglo-American and associated academic circles that reflect upon various topics directly or indirectly related to everyday aesthetics, such as those of Kupfer (1983), Tuan (1993), Dissanayake (1995), Berleant (1991; 1995; 2005) or Saito (2008), along with non-Anglo-American authors like myself (Mandoki) (1994; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2007a; 2007b) and Naukkarinen (1998). In considering the environment as an integral part of experience, Berleant pioneered the discussion on environmental and active non-contemplative aesthetics, focusing on both natural and constructed surroundings through active aesthetic engagement. Dissanayake proposes a Darwinian approach to aesthetics, but is in fact concerned with an anthropological view of artistic behaviours or 'artification' as she calls this. Saito follows Tuan's idea in contemplating nature and everyday aspects beyond the art-centric paradigm, using instead a beauty-centric perspective. In my earlier work, I, along with Kupfer, take neither an art-centric nor a beauty-centric perspective, setting aside any Panglossian view of aesthetics by examining both its positive and negative impacts on everyday life, as in the case of aesthetic violence and manipulation through educational, political and other social institutions.

I will examine three authors who indirectly deal with objects related to the concept of earthiness: Quinet (1981), Leddy (1995), and Dissanayake (1996; 2007). Each of them represents one of the three directions taken for analysing everyday aesthetics that is not centred on beauty or decoration and design. Quinet centres her analysis upon an ordinary material, namely food, claiming that it can or should be considered artistic. Leddy explores two sets of binary qualities ('neat/messy' and 'clean/dirty') and proposes that they should be included among aesthetic qualities. Dissanayake focuses on an everyday behaviour that she calls 'making special' to argue that it should be considered the aesthetic behaviour *par excellence* and the foundation of all art. Quinet defends the aestheticity of an everyday object, Leddy that of everyday qualities and Dissanayake of everyday behaviours, and all three build their cases in relation to art. Is this an effective strategy?

1.1 Everyday objects

Quinet takes the argumentative strategy of advocating that something we normally consider non-artistic, such as food, can be encompassed within the highly demanding frame of what can be accepted as art in order to persuade us that it is indeed a candidate worthy of aesthetic appreciation. She works against the following thesis: '1) The only central function of a work of art *qua* art is to provide an object for aesthetic contemplation. 2) Food *qua* food has the central function of providing an object for consumption and digestion. 3) Therefore, nothing can be simultaneously considered *qua* food and *qua* art (Quinet 1981: 160). In contrast, she builds her case as follows: 1) If an aesthetically relevant function is the capacity of a thing for presenting an object of aesthetic appreciation to the senses, and 2) knowledge of the nutritive aspects of certain foods might be relevant to our aesthetic appreciation of them, then 3) food 'might very well enter into our recognition of it as a genuine work of art' (Quinet 1981: 169–170).

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But her argument fails because she does not prove 2) to be true. Further, 3) does not derive from 1) and 2), and a new element in 3), 'a genuine work of art', appears from out of the blue (it is not defined nor even mentioned in the preceding premises, because in principle she is dealing with aesthetic perception, not with art). Her argument gets embroiled in a circular definition, where 'aesthetically relevant function' is defined by 'aesthetic appreciation to the senses' and vice versa.

Although the 'aesthetically relevant' does involve the senses, this does not imply that it is restricted to the sensuous: understanding, imagination, emotion and other faculties are also drawn in. Quinet suggests that we should 'broaden our idea of the "senses" so as to include forms of intellectual appreciation'. In that we agree with her. However, there are various forms of intellectual appreciation that might or might not be particularly relevant to aesthetic appreciation, so why precisely would the knowledge of nutritional factors matter? Knowing the exact number of calories present in Károly Gundel Crepes or Udvarhely lamb chops is hardly relevant to appreciating or enjoying them, since the enjoyment of food is assessed by tasting it, not by looking at its calories on a chart. If any broadening of the assessment criteria were in order in this specific case, perhaps the inclusion of the sense of *umami* or savouriness of the meat and fat would be more to the point. Intellectual appreciation is not really a 'sense' and is not necessary for justifying the inclusion of food within the realm of aesthetics, unless, ironically, a purely sensorial definition of the aesthetic was taken as a given by Quinet, so that she now wishes to include something more cognitive. We agree that knowledge contributes to appreciation, but why privilege the nutritional factors rather than, say, how a particular dish is spiced or what symbolic associations other cultures have of this dish? In fact it is hard to find artworks that do not demand a significant degree of intellectual appreciation, but this does not generally include a precise awareness of the chemical composition of the mixture of oils in the paint or the percentage of linen or cotton in the canvas, much less the type of wood used to construct a violin, say, but rather of the content and meaning of the overall artwork itself. Lastly, it does not follow from Quinet's premises that food can be recognized as artistic because she has not suggested or established what are we supposed to understand by a 'artistic' in that context. Anything that qualifies as having an aesthetic element does not automatically qualify as art. One can cite nature as such an instance.

Quinet's case might have been better made had she discussed Beardsley's claim that smell and taste lack sufficient order to enable 'taste-symphonies and smell-sonatas' but unfortunately this challenge was not taken up (Beardsley 1958: 98–99, quoted by Quinet 1981: 166). The whole enterprise of bringing a non-artistic object within the ambit of artistic criteria to justify its aesthetic value is totally unnecessary because food, to begin with, already has the capacity for sensuous richness that appeals to our sensibility, that is, to aesthesis. The best argument on her behalf would have been to discuss a direct experience with any great chef's *oeuvre* or the experience described by Babette's guests in Karen Blixen's tale *Babette's Feast*.[1] No one fortunate enough to enjoy such culinary finesse would deny its genuinely aesthetic value, although its status as art is quite another matter, depending on the rules of each particular institution, as Danto and Dickie have clearly argued. In short, Quinet could have defended the aesthetic value of food without appealing to an art-centric paradigm simply by leaving it where it belongs: right on the table for our delight.[2]

1.2 Everyday qualities

Another effort to include everyday aspects into aesthetic theory is Leddy's proposal that there are other aesthetic qualities that constitute 'an entire class of neglected properties' opposed to, and equally important as, the class of expressive properties. The initial dichotomy of expressive versus surface qualities from which he develops his case is already a problematic *petitio principii*. Such

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'everyday surface qualities' as 'neat', 'messy', 'clean' and 'dirty', or activities like 'cleaning one's room' are also focused through the art-centric frame by addressing them with reference to the categories proposed by Beardsley, Sibley, Hermerén and Goodman. Leddy builds his case by arguing first that these qualities fit with one of the five kinds of aesthetic qualities enumerated by Hermerén, namely *gestalt* (the others being emotion, behaviour, taste and the affective). He then applies Sibley's criteria for aesthetic concepts (i.e. that they should be linked to non-aesthetic concepts, be perceptual, determined by sensitivity and non-rule-governed) and manages to fit the quality of neatness into all four of these, adding that 'there can be considerable pleasure in contemplating something cleaned with great effort' (Leddy 1995: 264). He asserts that cleaning one's room can definitely be an aesthetic experience through applying the test of Beardsley's five symptoms of aesthetic experience (object-directedness, felt freedom, detached affect, active discovery and a sense of wholeness). Finally, Leddy measures surface qualities against Goodman's 'four symptoms of the aesthetic' (syntactic density, semantic density, syntactic repleteness and exemplification) and since surface qualities are not constituted by systems of symbols and 'Goodman only insists that one of the symptoms of the aesthetic be present', he eliminates the first three and argues for the fourth, namely exemplification, which renders 'cleanness of a room as exemplifying cleanness' (Leddy 1995: 266).

Leddy names as 'surface qualities' this new class of aesthetic qualities whose members are 'clean', 'dirty', 'neat' and 'messy'. However, such qualities do not seem as superficial and exterior as he claims, but rather are intrinsic, affecting in some cases the deep meaning of artworks in artistic styles such as expressionism, minimalism, neoplasticism, materic informalism and hard-edge abstractionism, among others. We do not appreciate minimalism or Duchamp's urinal only because it is clean, nor Rouault's, Tapies', or Burri's paintings simply because they are messy, but because they are expressive, relevant, consistent in form and content, and arouse human artistic sensibility.

As I have insistently argued elsewhere, aesthetic categories are an inherent part not only of artworks but of everyday life (Mandoki, 1994; 2006a; 2006b; 2007). We constantly take into consideration not only order but symmetry, proportion, contrast, colour, saturation, hue, harmony, texture and balance in all aspects of our daily lives, such as when we choose fruits at the market, a house to live in, clothes to wear, a landscape to enjoy, a dish we cook. Aesthetics involves appreciating a great variety of positive and negative qualities and categories besides beauty and sublimity. To mention a few: the ugly, the grotesque, the tragic, the comic, the sordid, the subtle, the refined, the vulgar, the slimy, the corny, the slick, the cool, the appalling, the disgusting, among which the clean or the dirty may find a place, as long as their value depends on the context (a microscopically dirty scalpel is not aesthetically relevant, but medically crucial). These and many more qualities reflect our capacity and range to evaluate aspects of our everyday experience, and such evaluation is partly aesthetic.

1.3 Everyday behaviours

Another attempt to defend aesthetics on an art-centric basis is Dissanayake's idea that 'the species-centrist regards art not as an entity or quality but instead as a behavioural tendency, a way of doing things' (1995: 34). She refers to 'the biological core of art, the stain that is deeply dyed in the behavioural marrow of humans everywhere', which she defines as 'making special': 'it is not art […] but making special that has been evolutionarily or socially and culturally important' (Dissanayake 1995: 42, 56). Dissanayake explains that not all 'making special' is art, but all art is 'making special', although she does not provide a framework for distinguishing an artistic

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'making special' from a non-artistic 'making special'. Her main purpose is to prove that art is a natural behaviour and one that is necessary for survival. If this were true, two consequences would directly follow: first, being survivors, we would all be artists, and second, specialized artists would be better at surviving than the non-specialized. However, the opposite seems to be the case, as illustrated by Van Gogh, Modigliani, Mozart, Caravaggio, Artaud, Chopin, Beethoven and countless others who lived very turbulent lives and met premature deaths. Problems of personal adaptation to social conventions seem to be the rule rather than the exception among the most talented artists.

Art, by definition, is always artificial as it belongs to the world of artifactuality or the dimension of 'work'. Hannah Arendt (1998) insightfully elaborated this categorization in *The Human Condition*, distinguishing it from the category of 'labour'. We are all, as humans, equally capable of aesthetic response and activity, but we are definitely not equally so for artistic work. This art-centric paradigm leads Dissanayake (2007: 8) to speak of art behaviour or 'artification' as 'the overarching motivational system-or-adaptation composed of dancing, singing, decorating, carving – the various arts.' Yet we all dance in many different situations, such as at weddings and parties or alone on our patio, we sing in the shower, and decorate cakes and dinner tables, but none of this converts us into artists.

The main problem with the claims of Quinet, Leddy and Dissanyake is that they do not make the basic distinction between the aesthetic and the artistic, an unfortunate detail that hinders them from acknowledging that eating, cleaning and adorning are certainly aesthetic activities because they have effects on our sensibility, but they have nothing to do with art. They are aesthetic because they relate to aesthesis or sensibility, not to dexterity or artistry. The art-centric paradigm is not an effective strategy to analyse non-artistic objects because it imposes upon them, by definition, extraneous criteria.

2. Keeping everyday objects, qualities and behaviours where they belong: right in the kitchen

Aesthetics has long been taken as a synonym for beauty and refinement. The unrefined, by contrast, is related to the raw and the crude and situated where the raw is cooked and the crude is prepared: right in the kitchen. Yet, generation after generation, this is where a significant part of most people's delight in life has been silently cultivated. Joyous childhood memories and a sense of rootedness are brought to fruition around the kitchen. Whatever nourishes and warms the family is centred in the kitchen, where the most pleasant smells waft, not the delicate and enticing fragrances from flowers, but aromas generated by broths, herbs, oils, and fruits. The kitchen nurtures us in body and soul.

A pot of soup and a loaf of bread lack any quality of extraordinariness, originality or novelty. They are too basic to be admired in an artistic manner and too primary to motivate any state of contemplation. Baking bread and cooking soup is not done for any aesthetic purpose but merely because it has to be done. They do not require creative, original work but plain ephemeral labour (Arendt's distinction). These everyday events of boiling soup or baking bread express a sense of earthiness, such as that captured by Vermeer's *Milkmaid* that allows one almost to feel the texture and sense the smell and taste of the bread and milk, touch the straw basket, the clay pot, the wooden box, the brass lamp, her heavy cotton and wool clothes and even perceive the warmth of her body. All such impressions involve our sensibility and root the aesthetic significance of materiality in everyday life.

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3. Knowing and kneading

Kneading bread seems too simple an activity to be worthy of the least philosophical attention, whereas the act of knowing has inspired solid and substantial books, from Plato's *Theaetetus* to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, as well as a whole branch of philosophy and a field of science: epistemology and cognitive science. Are kneading and knowing really as far apart as they seem? Kneading dough is the perfect analogy for theoretical or artistic work. We go back multiple times to the same artwork or text as to the same lump of dough, heating it a bit with hands or ideas, rolling it now and then, punching it down when it tends to rise too much, improving its consistency, varying its ingredients, letting it ferment and finally giving its last shape before it is baked in the oven and served to others for enjoyment. Knowing and kneading both have to start from what has been done before: knowing begins with thoughts and ideas previously elaborated by others upon the same issues (the state of the art), just as kneading restarts from sourdough left over from the previous day's preparation.

Bread, like language and art, appeared almost everywhere thousands of years ago, emerging in various forms, from Bedouin *shrak* to Indian *chapatis*, Sardinian *fogli di musica*, Iranian *sang-gak*, Ukrainian *chernyi klib*, Scandinavian *limpa*, English coburg loaves, Mexican *tortillas*, Moroccan *khobz*, Chinese *man-t'ou* and many other shapes. A loaf of bread has the power to stimulate our senses of smell, taste, touch and sight. Placing a newly-baked, warm loaf in the middle of the dinner table may be the culminating event of the day when the efforts of the whole family are drawn together. How many of us can remain indifferent to a home-made, fresh loaf of bread? Whoever has baked bread and proudly placed it on the table knows very well the genuinely aesthetic pleasure it elicits.

Bread, like art, also has symbolic connotations and ceremonial uses. Bread was the first thing Abraham offered when he was visited by the Lord (*Genesis* 18: 5–6) and it was unleavened bread that Lot gave to the angels who appeared before him in Sodom (19:3). Jacob served Esau bread with lentil soup in exchange for his birthright (25: 34), while their mother Rebecca gave bread to Jacob, together with savoury goat meat, to bring to his dying father in order to induce Isaac into blessing him in his brother's place (27: 17). Jacob, in turn, later received bread sent from Egypt by his beloved son Joseph, together with other provisions, when there was a famine on the land (45: 23).

Unleavened bread symbolizes the Jews' escape from Egypt at the first Passover (*Exodus*: 12: 8–17). For Christians, bread represents the body of Jesus through the Eucharist affirmation: 'I am the bread of life'. Bread has been associated with the cult of deities all over the world, and is often decorated in special forms for these purposes. Ancient Swedes used to mould dough in the shape of a female figure as a symbol of fertility. Mexicans 'feed' the dead with special *panes de muerto* on 1 and 2 November over beautifully ornamented tables and tombs. The idols that Hernán Cortés and the conquistadors found in Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec empire, were shaped from a kind of bread made of corn dough mixed with blood. The Aztec myth of creation also begins with man and woman made from corn dough that received life from the blood which dropped from the god Quetzalcoatl's penis when he pierced it with a cactus thorn. All these metaphorical associations attest to the fact that dough and bread is often linked symbolically to the body. Bread is seen by many as the very substance of life.

Many similar examples of the intimate connection between bread and human nature may be found among other people's mythologies. For the Greeks, men were typically described as bread-eating creatures. Referring to a giant, Odysseus declares that he 'was not like a man that lives by bread, but like a wooded peak of lofty mountains, which stands out to view alone, apart from the rest' (Homer, *Odyssey*: 9.190). As ambrosia and ichor defined the gods, so bread and blood defined the human: 'Out came the goddess's immortal blood, the ichor that

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flows in the veins of the happy gods, who eat no bread nor drink our flaming wine, and so are bloodless and are called immortals' (Homer, *Iliad*: 5.340, E.V. Rieu *trans.*). Herodotus (2005: 3.150), writing of Babylon, says: 'And the Babylonians revolted ... and did this: sending away all the mothers, each chose one woman, whomever he liked of his domestics, as a bread-maker; as for the rest, they gathered them together and strangled them so they would not consume their bread'. Hesiod (1914: 28) wrote that Pandora's vase set loose 'a plague to men who eat bread' that is, sparing no one.

In classical and biblical writings, as well as in ordinary conversations, bread equates to human life, so 'earning one's daily bread' literally means 'earning one's living'. Whenever there is bread, human life is possible. In his *Historical Library* (3.10.5) Diodorus Siculus wrote of the peoples of ancient North Africa: 'Many accepted the offer and received an oracular response from Apollo that they should found a city in the place where there would be water to drink in due measure, but bread to eat without measure ...'. In ancient cultures, as still today, breaking bread with someone meant sharing much more than the bread itself. Giving bread was also the symbol of greeting and welcoming guests. 'Maids went round with the bread-baskets, pages filled the mixing-bowls with wine and water, and they laid their hands upon the good things that were before them' (*Odyssey* I.136-140, S. Butler trans.). In the *Odyssey*, Homer repeats this idea at least five times (4.55, 7.175, 15.135, 17.90, 17.255). The main daily chore women had to perform was bread-making; Euripides' Hecuba bitterly complains about it: 'And there the tasks that least befit the evening of my life will they impose on me, Hector's mother, to watch their gates and keep the keys, or bake their bread' (*The Trojan Women*, 467–510).

Bread, in itself, is neither beautiful nor artistic, but if it only appealed to our stomach these numerous symbolic associations could hardly be explained, which confirms its pull upon our sensibility. Opposed to what is slick and showy, bread is distinctive by a quality common to both ethics and aesthetics: its goodness. Bread is aesthetic for its symbolic, imaginative, emotional and sensual connotations. Its rich mythical, social and religious significance could well be due to a general sense that if the essence of life is contained somewhere, it could be in no better place than in bread. The moon may be made out of cheese, but the earth is certainly made out of bread.

4. The wondrous in a pot of soup

Is there anything more prosaic than bread? Well, perhaps a simple pot of soup 'black with soot and full of dents'. Though it is far from an artwork, a Sioux Indian's perception and beautiful description of this pot and the soup it contains eloquently illustrates an aesthetic response towards a very ordinary thing:

> What do you see here, my friend? Just an ordinary old cooking pot, black with soot and full of dents.
>
> It is standing on the fire on top of that old wood stove, and the water bubbles and moves the lid as the white steam rises to the ceiling. Inside the pot is boiling water, chunks of meat with bone and fat, and plenty of potatoes.
>
> It doesn't seem to have a message, that old pot, and I guess you don't give it a thought. Except the soup smells good and reminds you that you are hungry. Maybe you are worried that this is a dog stew. Well, don't worry. It's just beef – not fat puppy for a special ceremony. It's just an ordinary, everyday meal.

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> But I'm an Indian. I think about ordinary, common things like this pot. The bubbling water comes from the rain cloud. It represents the sky. The fire comes from the sun which warms us all – men, animals, trees. The meat stands for the four-legged creatures, our animal brothers, who gave themselves so that we should live. The steam is living breath. It was water; now it goes up to the sky, becomes a cloud again. These things are sacred. Looking at that pot full of good soup, I am thinking how, in this simple manner, Wakan Tanka takes care of me. We Sioux spend a lot of time thinking about everyday things which in our mind are mixed up with the spiritual. We see in the world around us many symbols that teach us the meaning of life. We have a saying that the white man sees so little, he must see with only one eye. We see a lot that you no longer notice. You could notice if you want to, but you are usually too busy. We Indians live in a world of symbols and images where the spiritual and the commonplace are one. To you symbols are just words, spoken or written in a book. To us they are part of nature, part of ourselves – the earth, the sun, the wind and the rain, stones, trees, animals, even little insects like ants and grasshoppers. We try to understand them not with the head but with the heart, and we need no more than a hint to give us meaning.
>
> What to you seems commonplace seems to us wondrous through symbolism. This is funny, because we don't even have a word for symbolism, yet we are all wrapped up in it. You have a word, but that's all. (Fire & Erdoes 1994: 77–78)

Understanding this pot as a symbol of the universe and of life requires a sensitivity to meaningful resonances. In this example, we find a literal illustration of Kant's 'free play of imagination and understanding' as typifying aesthetic response. Basic as it is, a mere pot of soup, though far from being a significant idea of a genius or a masterpiece, it provides an opportunity for a significant aesthetic relation with our surroundings. The Sioux Lame Deer did not claim to be writing literature, and we would betray his intentions by interpreting his account as artistic, but his way of perceiving the boiling stew pot brings out what we all have in common.[3]

No associations made here are arbitrary: bubbling water evokes the rain that falls from the rainclouds, which in turn evoke the sky. The fire heating the pot suggests the sun, the meat recalls four-legged creatures, the steam evokes the breath. Anyone looking at a pot of soup would normally see nothing more than 'just an ordinary, everyday meal.' Yet what Lame Deer found in this pot, beyond its strict functional quality, is perfectly sound as a response. He did not examine it for Quinet's 'nutritive aspects' nor find in the pot 'a genuine work of art'. The dirtiness of the soot-caked pot did not demand to be cleaned up to acquire an 'aesthetic surface quality'. There was no 'making special' in this pot of soup and yet Lame Deer describes it in genuinely aesthetic terms. This man's perception, symbolically overflowing from denotation to connotation, illustrates an understanding of the aesthetic as awareness of the wondrous within the ordinary and the joy that is in sheer materiality.

Far from Babette's culinary masterpiece, this unsophisticated pot of boiling soup is nonetheless aesthetically relevant and appealing. It elicits along with bread a feeling of earthiness that engages our sensibility and embraces each of the four natural elements enumerated by the ancient pre-Socratic philosopher, Empedocles of Akragas: fire and earth, water and wind.

5. Conclusion

Paying too much attention to the resonances of what we encounter in everyday life would constantly distract and hinder us from reacting to immediate and concrete problems. We need basic and effective ways for organizing our practical lives, so musing over symbolic echoes and hidden significance can be dangerous when a swift reaction is required. And yet attention to these meanings and echoes is essential for human existence.

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Boiling soup and baking bread are obviously not the sole opportunities to encounter the sense of earthiness, but the certitude that hot soup and warm bread are there for us can be no less aesthetically satisfying than contemplating a landscape or a painting. These offer the opportunity of 'effortlessly slipping into a state of calm and serene satisfaction, marked by feelings of quiet joy and well-being'. This is Carlson's (1997: 47) description of his experience in relation to Japanese gardens, except for one word – 'contemplation' – for which I have substituted 'satisfaction'. In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant stated (§1): 'if the given representations are rational, but are referred in a judgement solely to the subject (to its feeling), they are always to that extent aesthetic.' Representations of earthiness, as of beauty and the sublime, are aesthetic because they are referred to the subject and her feelings. Earthiness does not depend on the knowledge of the composition and proportion of flour, yeast and water in bread, nor of the vitamins and proteins in the soup as Quinet would argue. No 'artified' decorations are relevant here, nothing about bread and soup that might make them special, no neat and tidy spaces are present, but rather the opposite: the black soot of charcoal and the white powder of flour are akin to the consistency of soil and the density of bricks or wet clay. Earthiness depends on a feeling that bread and soup are there for us expressing, as a nurturing mother, the generosity of life. No beauty, no art; simply care and vigour.

I have proposed an aesthetic contour for the sense of earthiness to describe the manner in which we are sensually affected by it. As we have seen, it is not the object itself as a loaf of bread or a bowl of soup that arouses our aesthetic interest, but, as Berleant has maintained, the environment created around these simple items and the way we engage with them. To recognize and experience these atmospheres and events as aesthetic we need neither the art-centric nor the beauty-centric paradigm. It is not a question of contemplating a loaf of bread or a pot of soup if one is seeking an aesthetic experience, as in these objects themselves there is no beauty or artistic originality. A baked and fermented lump of wet flour or a murky boiling broth can hardly be considered formally interesting or worthy of contemplation. Yet they are rich in connotations and emotionally gratifying, capable of stimulating our imagination and our senses by conveying symbolic depth to anyone receptive enough to perceive this. These cases illustrate situations that engage our sensibility and animate primeval resonances by appealing to our sense of earthiness. Not by bread alone does man live, nor in art and beauty alone does the aesthetic abide.

Notes

1. Published under the pseudonym of Isak Dinesen.
2. Welsch (2005) also uses the art paradigm for arguing that sports are artistic via the same axis that Quinet projects when arguing for food.
3. Ironically, this account quoted in Dissanayake (1995: 215) contradicts by itself the notion of "making special", because soup is nothing special yet profoundly meaningful.

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