

NOVELS IN THE EVERYDAY: AN AESTHETIC INVESTIGATION

KALLE PUOLAKKA

Everyday aestheticians have had relatively little to say about literature. Inspired by Peter Kivy's philosophy of literature as laid out in his books *The Performance of Reading* and *Once-Told Tales*, I examine reading literature as a part of everyday life. I argue that not only do Kivy's views help explain the value that avid readers place on their daily silent engagement with a book, but that his philosophy of literature also shows how literary works can have an aesthetic presence in our everyday lives even during periods in-between reading a book. In light of the paper, literary reading turns out to be an artistic routine that fills avid readers' everyday lives in a very literal sense.

I. INTRODUCTION

Everyday aesthetics is a relatively new, but rapidly growing, subdiscipline of philosophical aesthetics that deals with questions concerning the aesthetic value of everyday artefacts and events, and the value they can have in our everyday lives. There has been considerable dispute within this field over what sort of position art and aesthetic theory – which has largely been shaped by considerations of art – should have in aesthetic examinations of the everyday.¹ A noteworthy feature of this discussion is that it is almost entirely framed in terms of the visual arts and its descendants, such as environmental and performance art. Examples cited within these discussions range from still-life painting, surrealism, pop art, and the photography of Henri Cartier-Bresson to works of contemporary performance art featuring everyday phenomena, such as cooking.² The institutional nature of the visual arts also explains why they have dominated the perspective on the relationship between art and the everyday of everyday aesthetics. Though most people have paintings in their homes, these are rarely among the most aesthetically striking specimens of the art of painting – we cannot all be like Napoleon having the *Mona Lisa* on

I was very fortunate to have reviewers, whose careful and helpful comments on two earlier versions of the paper enabled me to significantly improve the initial submission. Thank you. I am also very grateful to the Finnish Cultural Foundation for financially supporting this research.

¹ For two contrasting positions, see Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13–43, and Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2012), 9, 91, 109–13.

² See Leddy, *Extraordinary in the Ordinary*, 51, 110; Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 32–33, and for the Cartier-Bresson example, Arto Haapala, 'On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place', in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, ed. Jonathan M. Smith and Andrew Light (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 39–55.

our bathroom wall. These works can be encountered only in a museum, gallery, or some other type of exhibition setting. Visiting these places requires a conscious decision to leave one's everyday dealings behind. Many everyday aestheticians have regarded this type of closed aesthetic space as the point where everyday aesthetics ends, compelling the visitor to take on a distanced and reflective attitude toward the works on display that is alien to how we engage with objects in our everyday lives.³

One art that has received scarcely any attention in everyday aesthetics is literature.⁴ Literature's presence in our lives is quite different from many other art forms. Most notably, reading literature does not require any special museum-like setting, but we can engage with even the greatest of novels in the most mundane places, such as cafés, parks, on public transport, and, of course, in the privacy of our home. In other words, in browsing through an art book in a café or the digital collections of a museum on our laptop, we are in contact with artworks through pictures of them, whereas in everyday reading we are engaged with the actual work. Secondly, in contrast to works of visual art and music, it can take several days or even weeks to finish a novel. As Peter Kivy explains, real time and artistic time do not coincide in the case of literature. Reading a novel from start to finish usually takes several days in real time, but the time we are actually engaged with the book during this period is much smaller.⁵ This is of course assuming that one does not read the novel through in one sitting, something Kivy does not, in fact, find an appropriate way of experiencing. In his view, the gaps between periods of reading have an important function too, an element of Kivy's argument which will be important for my account of literature below.

Though the notion of the everyday does not figure systematically in the discussion on the cognitive value of literature,⁶ it is precisely everyday life that is considered to be of concern regarding the cognitive enrichments that books are seen to offer;⁷ some believe that powerful reading experiences can

³ See Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 27–28.

⁴ For a very brief exception, see *ibid.*, 9n1.

⁵ Peter Kivy, *Once-Told Tales: An Essay in Literary Aesthetics* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 78. Hereafter: *OTT*.

⁶ Philosophers have famously attributed various sorts of cognitive gains to literature, from enhancing our sense of empathy to providing conceptual knowledge. For a good general account, see Jukka Mikkonen, *The Cognitive Value of Philosophical Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

⁷ In Martha Nussbaum's famous account of the moral significance of literature, for example, novels are seen to embody what she calls 'a sense of life', and through an emotive engagement with novels readers can gain access to different senses of life, novels thereby giving an opportunity for moral enhancement. The concept of 'sense of life' comes up repeatedly in Nussbaum's classic work *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

even change the very way we see our everyday or at least some significant aspect of it.⁸ Given this, it is strange that everyday aesthetics, as it has evolved in the past twenty or so years, has not examined literature in any detail. My aim, however, is not to put forward yet another view on the everyday cognitive value of literature, but rather to analyse reading as an everyday phenomenon and how literature, and novels in particular, are present in our everyday lives.

The view of everyday reading put forth draws on two key components of Peter Kivy's philosophy of literature: the understanding of reading as a performance and the role Kivy believes the gaps between the acts of reading have in the overall literary experience. Kivy's bold claim about the performative character of reading has raised a critical response especially from an ontological point of view.⁹ However, my focus will be different. What I find valuable in his account is the perspective it opens up on the act of reading. Kivy's analysis turns out to be particularly interesting when it is set in the context of everyday aesthetics. For not only does it reveal new value in those everyday moments where we quietly engage with a literary work, but it also shows how the gaps between reading can give their own unique import on the aesthetics of everyday life as well.¹⁰ While my account owes a great deal to Kivy, it also parts ways with his philosophy of literature in that I believe literary works are aesthetically richer objects than his literary non-aestheticism allows. However, I take the analysis of the aesthetic sides of novels presented below to strengthen the major claim about reading as a performance; the aesthetic aspects of novels have to be properly realized in the performance of reading and they manifest themselves differently in different ways of performing the silent reading of the work.

My analysis of everyday reading drawing on Kivy's view also sheds new light into some general issues within everyday aesthetics, especially regarding the nature of everyday routines. Many have argued that everyday aesthetics should take precisely the routine and habitual character of everyday

⁸ See, for example, David Novitz, *Knowledge, Fiction, and Imagination* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 352–53, and Catherine Z. Elgin, 'Art in the Advancement of Understanding,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (2002): 1–12.

⁹ See, for example, the reviews of Kivy's *Performance of Reading* by David Davies in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66 (2008): 89–91, and by Anna Christina Ribeiro in *Mind* 118 (2009): 186–90.

¹⁰ To avoid repetition, I will also talk of literary works, books, and prose fiction. Unless it is otherwise indicated, in all cases the literary form I have in mind is, however, the novel. The approach to reading developed in the article might also illuminate our engagements with other literary forms, particularly short stories, but this issue is not within the scope of the paper.

life as its starting point.¹¹ Instead of the extraordinary moments that sometimes raise the everyday above the ordinary and the mundane, these theorists argue that the aesthetics of everyday life is to be found in the routines of the everyday and in the feelings of safety and of being ‘in control’ their carrying out can engender.¹² One proponent of this approach, which has been termed ‘restrictivism’, Arto Haapala, has called everyday aesthetics ‘an aesthetics of “the lacking”’, which he understands as ‘the quiet fascination of the absence of visual, auditory, and any other kinds of demands from the surroundings’.¹³ Everyday aesthetics, in this sense, is not something that strikes us or inspires our attention, but rather something characterized by a soothing sense of familiarity, a feeling that restrictivists take to be aesthetic in kind.

Especially for an avid reader, reading is very much one of life’s routines and I argue that everyday reading is accompanied by the same experiential qualities restrictivists in everyday aesthetics have attributed to everyday routines. However, I believe that my analysis also shows that everyday routines can have aspects of significance and value that restrictivists have not taken into proper consideration, as well as fortifying the point some have made against restrictivism that our everyday routines and habits are considerably more diverse and multifarious than its proponents have realized.¹⁴ The analysis also reveals some interesting differences between the reading moments of the avid reader and of the more occasional reader.

¹¹ Along with Haapala, ‘On the Aesthetics of Familiarity’, see, for example, Kevin Melchionne, ‘The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics’, *Contemporary Aesthetics* 11 (2013), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0011.026>; Ossi Naukkarinen ‘What Is “Everyday” in Everyday Aesthetics’, *Contemporary Aesthetics* 11 (2013), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0011.014>; and Yuriko Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Aesthetics and World-Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 9–11.

¹² Haapala, ‘On the Aesthetics of Familiarity’, 52.

¹³ Ibid. The term ‘restrictivism’ derives from Thomas Leddy’s article ‘Experience of Awe: An Expansive Approach to Everyday Aesthetics’, *Contemporary Aesthetics* 13 (2015), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0013.008>. The term is intended to collect together the group of everyday aestheticians who seem to restrict the scope of everyday aesthetics to the aesthetic aspects of mundane, ordinary, or even trivial experiences – or at least tend to think that these form the primary objects of research of the field. For critical discussion of the term, see Ossi Naukkarinen, ‘Everyday Aesthetics and Everyday Behavior’, *Contemporary Aesthetics* 15 (2017), <https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=802>.

¹⁴ See, for example, my ‘On Habits and Functions in Everyday Aesthetics’, *Contemporary Aesthetics* 16 (2018), <https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=846>.

II. LITERARY PERFORMANCES AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EVERYDAY READING

Kivy defends his claim that reading should be understood along the lines of performance, firstly by pointing out the close ties that the practice of reading fictional literature has had with performance-like activities, such as readings taking place in public gatherings in the ancient world, or the act of reading aloud by oneself that was typical before the contemporary system of writing developed.¹⁵ Our current understanding of reading as something done alone and in silence is actually a relatively recent phenomenon.¹⁶ According to Kivy, it was not until the eighteenth century that reading silently to oneself emerged as the most common mode of engaging with works of fiction, actually coinciding with the rise of the modern novel (*PR*, p. 18). He writes: 'fictional literature was largely a performing art until very recently' (*PR*, p. 19). Though reading fictional works has undergone some decisive changes in the course of history, Kivy believes remnants of the historical background where reading fiction was closely associated with a performance still persist in the modern practice of reading. The obvious fact that the act of reading literature is no longer usually carried out aloud does not undermine the possibility of understanding it as a performance; it is just a silent performance that finds its closest equivalent in the performance the musician enacts in their mind while reading a score (*PR*, pp. 35–41). Nor does the lack of an outside audience constitute an issue; reading is a performance readers present to themselves. As Kivy shows, there is no contradiction in the idea of a performance where the performer simultaneously constitutes the sole audience (*PR*, pp. 12–14).

For Kivy, novels are primarily vehicles for storytelling. This explains what the reader's performance is about. In reading, we are telling the story the book contains to ourselves. Referring to Plato's much disliked orator, Kivy finds the reader 'a silent Ion [...] enacting [...] the part of the storyteller' (*PR*, p. 63). One of the things that makes Kivy's analysis interesting from the point of view of everyday aesthetics is that it explains the high value that enthusiastic readers attach to reading; in giving a silent performance to ourselves, reading is a very intimate moment that is understandably cherished. This moment also corresponds to the artistic nature of the novel, which Kivy finds 'the quintessentially "private" work of art, to be experienced alone by the silent reader' (*PR*, p. 18).

¹⁵ Here Kivy is referring to a period in history, roughly until the late tenth century, when texts did not generally have spaces between words, but the separation of words was left for the reader to perform. This necessitated reading texts aloud, as it helped to articulate the content of the text for the reader.

¹⁶ Peter Kivy, *The Performance of Reading: An Essay in the Philosophy of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 7–8, 16. Hereafter: *PR*.

Some key aspects of the act of reading pointed out by Kivy reinforce the intimacy of the reading moment. Kivy finds reading literary fiction a highly ‘elaborate and laborious activity’, in that it requires the reader to “‘construct” the whole narrative from non-sensual material’ with ‘a *mental act* of the imagination’. Kivy continues:

The point is that in one obvious sense, silently reading literary fiction [...] is an act, and activity of the agent. Of course it might be argued that the appreciation of any work of art requires the mental activities of imagination, understanding and perception. But the obvious answer is that the silent reading of literary fiction requires *those* activities as well, in addition to the act, so to speak, of *bringing forth* the artistic object for those activities [...] it is an act, an activity to read a novel in order to experience it. (*PR*, p. 136)¹⁷

Kivy takes the cognitive efforts involved in reading to substantiate the claim of the performance-like character of reading. It requires something like a performance to render the literary work an object of the reader’s experience. But Kivy’s analysis of the challenges related to this performance can also be used to explain why recurrent everyday reading can be regarded as a very intimate moment. In moments of reading, our minds can be very active even though we do not exhibit any real outward signs of doing anything in particular, beyond being seemingly concentrated. Moreover, in the act of reading what we are absorbed in and reacting to with our imagination and emotions is present only to ourselves. Such elements transform reading into a private moment *par excellence*.

This silent moment also turns into a routine, especially for people who try to ensure a reading moment every day. Such a reader, in fact, comes close to the type of reader Kivy terms ‘serious in-it-for-the-story-reader’ (*OTT*, p. 33). The experiential character of reading, in fact, looks somewhat different in light of different reading habits. For an avid reader, it is not just the engagement with the imaginative content of the work and the transient escape from the everyday it provides that is experientially significant, but the daily reading moment itself can be accompanied by precisely those qualities restrictivists in everyday aesthetics have attached to various everyday routines, such as a sense of security, of things being in their right places; that is to say, a general feeling of everydayness. As Michael Burke writes, following Alberto Manguel, the author of *A History of Reading*, ‘the combination of bed and book [...] might grant us “a kind of home” to

¹⁷ Kivy takes the fact that we generally do not feel like reading a serious novel when we are tired to also prove the point about the cognitive challenges involved in reading.

which we can return, no matter where we are or how old we have become.¹⁸

Interestingly, from this perspective, the avid reader's reading moment looks experientially richer than the occasional reader's. One example of this latter type of reader is Kivy's 'non-serious in-it-for-the-story-reader', who tends to grab a novel primarily in the hope of finding a catching story to 'fill in the time' when there is nothing better to do (*OTT*, p. 33). For such readers, the reading experience is solely constituted by the direct engagement with the book, without the added everyday quality that can accompany the reading moment of the avid reader.

While it is possible to see reading as an important part of the everyday, it, nevertheless, is a very different kind of routine than some of our more mundane everyday routines. One basic difference is that reading is a freely chosen routine, at least for adults; to be precise, it is something we can decide for ourselves whether or not to incorporate as a part of our everyday life. There are, of course, boundary conditions related to time and family situations, for example, even in the case of reading, but at least making reading an everyday routine is more in our own hands than those routines that are, for example, determined by our biological make-up, such as eating.

Reading is by no means the only freely chosen art-related everyday routine one can have. These also include performance-like activities, such as singing in the shower or, a particular favourite of mine, air conducting. However, Kivy's analysis suggests that everyday reading can attain a much deeper level of significance than these two other possible everyday routines. Even though they are also kinds of performances, singing in the shower and air conducting, for example, do not involve the same level of concentrated intimacy that I believe, following Kivy, explains the high value avid readers place on everyday reading; the kind of serious focus required by reading does not seem to have even any genuine place in them – or it would at least be taken as a sign of lunacy by many.¹⁹

Moreover, our interest in reading might have started off with a few books, but the more avidly we begin to read, the more fully immersed we become into a whole area of culture, which deepens the background of the individual everyday reading moment beyond the fleetingness characterizing playful everyday singing, whistling, and air conducting. The reading moment in a way

¹⁸ Michael Burke, *Literary Reading, Cognition and Emotion: An Exploration of the Oceanic Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 96–97.

¹⁹ Just think of a person who seriously tries to improve his air conducting skills by conducting Mahler.

connects this background, which, moreover, might date back decades in the case of many readers, as a part of the everyday, thus relating that single moment to a whole chain of reading moments. Reading, thereby, is an everyday routine that can exhibit growth, the deepening of significance, and a feeling of being immersed in something bigger, as essential elements. In the end, reading starts to resemble a ritual, finding a good parallel in the daily silent prayer of the religious practitioner. Sarah Worth, moreover, has argued that literary reading can be taken as a skill which develops over time.²⁰ Again a contrast opens up to more fleeting everyday artistic performances; development or some other type of accumulation is not a factor that comes into play in the case of singing in the shower or air conducting. In fact, it could even be argued that a kind of self-conscious mediocrity is in the very nature of activities such as singing in the shower.²¹

Some of these points might be fairly obvious especially to the serious in-it-for-the-story reader, but they interestingly emphasize the differences there can be between the everyday routines we need to carry out to sustain at least some level of well-being or to have any type of social life on the one hand, and those we can freely choose to engage in on the other. Despite all their emphasis on routines, these are aspects of our everyday lives restrictivists have not been sensitive enough to, for they tend to approach everyday routines as if they formed a kind of homogeneous group, whose basic model is given by activities such as commuting and daily grocery shopping. Routines, however, can carry very different levels of meaning and depth.²² The significance and intimacy the earlier analysis reveals in the everyday reading moment shows how different an everyday routine such as reading can, ultimately, be from the kinds of routines restrictivists have used to illuminate the general character of the everyday. Our everyday lives can, therefore, include significant aspects

²⁰ Sarah E. Worth, *In Defense of Reading* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 4.

²¹ With all this I am not trying to make the claim that the significance of everyday literary reading is of a completely *sui generis* kind. The scope of the possible artistic everyday routines is far too rich for that. For example, the daily Bach moment of an amateur pianist could have a level of significance comparable to the everyday reading performance. My attempt here is simply to analyse what sort of activity reading looks like, when it is understood as an integral part of everyday life. In other words, all the comparisons to other artistic activities I present in this and subsequent parts of the paper should not be understood as defending the unique character of literary reading among other possible everyday artistic routines, but rather as tools for illuminating the presence of literature in our lives.

²² For a more in depth examination of the differences between everyday routines, see my 'Does Valery Gergiev Have an Everyday?', in *Paths from the Philosophy of Art to Everyday Aesthetics*, ed. Oiva Kuisma, Sanna Lehtinen, and Harri Mäcklin (Helsinki: Finnish Society of Aesthetics, 2019), 132–47.

that the restrictivist understanding of routine does not fully capture. Kivy's understanding of reading as a silent performance readers present to themselves uncovers the interesting value aspects an everyday routine like reading can have.

III. REALIZING AESTHETIC POTENTIALITY IN READING

A closer look at the act of reading itself reveals that the reading moment can involve additional experientially and aesthetically valuable features, besides those having to do with the sense of everydayness, intimacy, and significance analysed in the previous section. Though Kivy believes the performance of reading can include such features as style, expression, and skill – which Kivy thinks separate reading literature from the reading of most nonfiction – he is quite sceptical as regards its aesthetic status (*OTT*, pp. 67–72). Only rarely does the reading performance directly concern aesthetic value and experience (*OTT*, p. 89). I am, however, more optimistic. After all, we often marvel at authors' linguistic creativity and at how they manage to breathe life into their characters and scenes. We appreciate the wonderfully composed sentences and ways of crystallizing thoughts and ideas, as well as contemplating the imagery.²³ We can also feel the emotional intensity rising as we near the climax of a book. These are some of the aspects that arguably also make novels valuable from an aesthetic point of view.

What is significant for understanding the aesthetic character of reading when it is conceived as a performance is that we try to match our inner voice with the book's emotional, expressive, and also, I believe, aesthetic structure. This effort required from the reader is one of the aspects of reading that turns it into a genuine performance and it is also what separates reading from other potentially aesthetically rewarding everyday aesthetic activities, such as going through the collection of a museum on your laptop: the aesthetic structure of the novel has to be realized in the silent reading. Moreover, the quality of the performance can have an effect on the experience of the work. Consider the following final paragraphs from Haruki Murakami's short story 'Kino' from the collection *Men without Women* (2014):

²³ Consider this longish, but wonderfully articulate sentence from Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*: 'Adventurousness was bound to assert its appeal sooner or later, but disillusioned by a sense that my family was slipping away from me right along with my country, I was ready to learn of the liberties a boy from an exemplary household could take when he stopped working to please everyone with his juvenile purity and discovered the guilty enjoyment of secretly acting on his own.' Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America* (New York: Random House, 2004), 114.

But the movement of time seemed not to be fixed properly. The bloody weight of desire and the rusty anchor of remorse were blocking its normal flow. The continuing rain, the confused hands of the clock, the birds still fast asleep, a faceless postal worker silently sorting through postcards, his wife's lovely breasts bouncing violently in the air, something obstinately tapping on the window. As if luring him deeper into a suggestive maze, this ever-regular beat. *Tap tap, tap tap*, then once more – *tap ta*. 'Don't look away, look right at it,' someone whispered in his ear. 'This is what your heart looks like.'

The willow branches swayed in the early-summer breeze. In a small dark room, somewhere inside Kino, a warm hand was reaching out to him. Eyes shut, he felt that hand on his, soft and substantial. He'd forgotten this, had been apart from it for far too long. Yes, I am hurt. Very, very deeply. He said this to himself. And he wept. All the while the rain did not let up, drenching the world in a cold chill.²⁴

Now, I find it hard to believe that I would be the only reader who, in encountering intensive passages of this kind, rereads them, shifting the pace of reading, as well as the shades of one's inner voice, until finding a way of reading the passage that best brings its expressive and aesthetic content to light.²⁵ Despite his general scepticism, Kivy does acknowledge that the 'sound' and 'sonic aspects' of prose literature can endow novels with an aesthetic content (*OTT*, pp. 25, 29), even a significant one, as in the case of Marcel Proust, for example (*OTT*, p. 71). Yet finding the best inner sound is precisely what we do when encountering an aesthetically rich literary passage. The way we silently engage with passages like the one from Murakami shows why reading can be a performance-like activity; the aesthetic content of the book can be actualized more or less properly in the reading in somewhat the same way as the aesthetic content of a musical work in a performance.

One concept that illuminates the aesthetic sides of the reading performance is rhythm. John Dewey, for example, argues that rhythm is an essential feature of aesthetic experience. He dismisses conceptions that identify rhythm with the steady repetition of identical elements, calling them the 'tick-tock theory' of rhythm. Instead of viewing rhythm in aesthetic experience 'analytically' or 'statistically', its elements should, in his view, be understood 'functionally', that is, in terms of the role they have in sustaining and building the experience. Rhythm in aesthetic experience should, in other words, be understood 'on the basis of furtherance, through the energy of the elements, of a complete and consummatory experience'.²⁶ Of course, rhythm is also a key feature of

²⁴ Haruki Murakami, *Men without Women: Stories*, trans. Philip Gabriel and Ted Goossen (New York: Knopf, 2017), 184–85.

²⁵ For Kivy's thoughts on the position of personal reading experiences in philosophical accounts of literature see *OTT*, pp. 1–3.

²⁶ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; New York: Perigee, 1980), 163.

literature. Novelists put a great amount of effort into finding the right kind of rhythm for their texts and it is one of the elements that constitute the author's often unique style of writing.

Such rhythm points out the performative character of reading. Readers in a way have to fit their inner voices with the rhythm of the novel they are reading. Sometimes this can be difficult and different authors pose different challenges to the reader. For example, engaging with the rhythmic quality of Hemingway's novels with their trademark short sentences is different from the effort of getting into the rhythm of authors who employ language in a more contemplative way, such as Hemingway's fellow Nobel Laureate José Saramago. Or think of reading Jayne Anne Phillips, who has been described as writing with all the five senses. The sonic aspects of prose literature that Kivy refers to are hugely important in Phillips's writing and at times it requires a very emotive, sensual, and imaginative way of reading to follow the events in her novels. Despite the differences between the textual rhythms of Hemingway, Saramago, and Phillips, all of these authors arguably demonstrate a distinct aesthetic quality. Moreover, the reader's capacity to follow the rhythm of a novel fluently without 'holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centers,' to quote Dewey, has a significant role in making the reading experience aesthetically valuable.²⁷ That is to say, the reader's performance has to be in sync with the rhythm of the text. Only then is the full aesthetic potentiality of the text actualized. This can be demanding, but very rewarding at the same time, as I believe all lovers of Phillips's novels will know.

This analysis of the aesthetic aspects of novels reinforces Kivy's major claim about what kind of activity reading is. The realization of the aesthetic features of the novel in reading is one of the acts that turns reading into a genuine performance. In these respects, reading can be very much an everyday *aesthetic* performance. Reading is also a unique kind of performance, as it is silent and has no other audience but the reader him or herself. However, this, I believe, largely explains the intimate value reading novels carries for many and why many people incorporate reading as one of the routines of their everyday lives and, moreover, why they might feel something to be missing in their day, if they, for whatever reason, cannot find a moment to settle down and engage in their daily silent performance. Ultimately, there seem to be two tiers in the avid reader's reading experience; there is the sense of everydayness and significance that can accompany the very reading moment, and then there are the experiential features of the act of reading itself analysed in this part that,

²⁷ Ibid., 36.

in a way, build upon the experiential feel of everydayness characterizing the reading moment.

IV. LITERARY GAPS AND THE EVERYDAY

Another interesting feature of Kivy's analysis of literary reading is that it emphasizes the significance of the periods between reading. In fact, he thinks these are an essential part of the art of the novel; novels are 'written as works meant to be read with temporal gaps' (*OTT*, p. 80). One should not even attempt to finish a novel in one go. The gaps are not mere empty spaces, but have a role in the overall artistic experience. Kivy's account of literary gaps points to new aspects of literature's bearing on our everyday lives.

One obvious experiential feature related to these gaps is suspense, caused by our wondering how the story of the book will continue. Sometimes the suspense can be so strong that it even obstructs our concentration on everyday chores. We cannot wait to get back to the book we are reading to see 'how things are going to turn out' (*OTT*, p. 80).²⁸ These gaps, however, have a more profound aspect to them beyond building suspense. Kivy is a literary cognitivist who believes literary works can give significant insights into the fundamental features of the human condition. In many cases, this cognitive status is of an indirect kind. That is to say, the cognitive content of literary works is not based on their putting forth explicit claims about fundamental human issues, but rather they can suggest a perspective on them indirectly, by, for example, portraying certain events or a certain character in a particular way. Kivy terms this aspect of novels 'implied hypotheses' (*PR*, p. 111). It is precisely these implied hypotheses that we are intended to reflect upon during periods between reading. As Kivy explains, novels 'have a sloppy outer boundary' (*PR*, p. 108). Thinking about 'this material' is 'part of the literary experience,' writes Kivy (*OTT*, p. 81). He continues: 'It makes little sense to think of the gaps in literary fiction as, somehow, a necessary evil [...] The gaps, rather, must be considered a *positive* part of our literary experience, where thinking about what we have read goes on as part of the literary experience' (*OTT*, p. 84). In this respect, literature can have a presence in our everyday lives even when we are not directly absorbed in a book.

However, along with cognitive reflection, these gaps can involve experiential or even aesthetic aspects. For a book can leave a distinctive felt impression that

²⁸ To take an example from my own life, I became so thoroughly engrossed in Joël Dicker's international bestseller *The Truth about the Harry Quebert Affair* (2012) that while attending a fairly mediocre performance of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, I could not wait to get back to the copy of Dicker's book I had with me at the opera to read during the intervals.

lingers on in readers' minds during the gaps in reading. We can, of course, also entertain the feel of an especially gripping recent musical performance or a great exhibition, but these impressions, nevertheless, have a different character compared to the experiential tone literary works we are in the process of reading can give to our everyday lives. The important difference is that we do not experience concerts or exhibitions as 'works in progress', as we do the books we have yet to finish (*OTT*, p. 91). In the case of the literary gap, the mind's entertaining is future-oriented and concerns an ongoing artistic experience, which is not usually the case with the feel of a recent concert or exhibition.

Suspense is not a characteristic only of the gaps between reading, but beginning a new book includes similar experiential traits. The feeling of musing on the experience lying ahead and of letting one's 'mind fill with thoughts in a warm-up for the mental exercises to come' upon starting a new book must be familiar to all avid readers,²⁹ as must the experience of getting hooked on a book after reading for a while. This is surely one of the peak literary experiences. But this experience can also be seen as relevant from the perspective of the everyday in a more general sense. For, arguably, part of the excitement readers feel in these kinds of cases has to do with the realization that their everyday lives of the near future have received a new significant experiential element. That moment literally changes our everyday experience for some time and the excitement we feel from getting hooked on a book can pertain to our everyday lives, even when we are not directly in contact with the source of our excitement.

In the literature on aesthetics, the type of experience I am trying to capture here, inspired by Kivy's view, has been approached, for example, with the concepts of mood and atmosphere. Drawing in particular on William James's philosophy of emotion, Richard Shusterman sees moods as providing 'a general affective orientation that selectively shapes our feelings, receptively encouraging some while resisting others.'³⁰ Moods are less determinate and intense than emotions and feelings and usually lack an intentional object. On the other hand, compared to emotions and feelings, moods are 'more pervasive, enduring, and general' and, thereby, define the character of our everyday lives in a more all-encompassing sense than do emotions and feelings.³¹ Mood 'colours our sensibility, giving experience its

²⁹ Burke, *Literary Reading*, 87.

³⁰ Richard Shusterman, 'Thought in the Strenuous Mood: Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Feeling', *New Literary History* 43 (2012): 435.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 438.

basic tonality' and it shapes our sensibilities and perception of the world around us.³²

Similar emphases are present in Böhme's concept of atmosphere. Like the moods in Shusterman's analysis, atmospheres 'indicate something indeterminate, difficult to express'.³³ They have an in-between status, in that it is not clear whether atmospheres should be attributed 'to the objects or environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them'.³⁴ We can talk of an atmosphere as being 'serene, melancholic, oppressive, uplifting, commanding, inviting, erotic, etc.', but we are 'unsure' what the proper object of these attributes is. Atmospheres 'seem to fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze'.³⁵ Despite their indeterminate ontological nature, atmospheres can, nevertheless, be constitutive elements of our experiential sphere.

These are precisely the kinds of experiential qualities that literary works can colour our everyday life with during the gaps in reading. Powerful literature can even set the underlying tone of our everyday life, in pretty much the same way Shusterman believes mood can, forming a kind of filter through which we experience the events and objects of our everyday life during the periods between reading.³⁶ Some books can, for example, make us smile inwardly throughout the time we are reading them, as did Niccolò Ammaniti's novel *Let the Games Begin* (2009) in my case. In this respect, the mood a book stirs in us can colour our everyday experience and even determine its underlying atmosphere.

The particular experience I am trying to capture here can be further illuminated with one of the key ideas of John Dewey's philosophy of experience. Dewey famously attaches to aesthetic experience an underlying quality that he thinks 'binds together' the different parts of the experience, 'making them a whole'. He argues that there is a structuring element in aesthetic experience that gives us a 'sense of things belonging or not belonging' to the experience, a sense of 'relevancy'.³⁷ This sense of what belongs to the experience and what does not is not grasped through reflection, but is

³² Ibid., 439.

³³ Gernot Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics', trans. David Roberts, *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993): 113.

³⁴ Ibid., 114.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ This point is reminiscent of the aesthetic cognitivist's claim that literary works can change our perception of our everyday lives. See, for example, Novitz, *Knowledge, Fiction, and Imagination*, 352–53, and Elgin, 'Art in the Advancement of Understanding'.

³⁷ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 194.

immediately felt. Shusterman thinks that the 'undefined pervasive quality' that Dewey believes underpins aesthetic experience can be taken as one element of an inarticulate mood.³⁸ This Deweyan understanding of experience sheds light on the hazy mood and atmosphere characterizing literary gaps, for the different instances of reading can be said to be connected by precisely this kind of undefined underlying quality. The mood or atmosphere of the work that lingers on after we take a pause from reading links the periods of reading together and makes the experience of the novel a more or less unified whole, even with the breaks in reading. This arguably is part of the explanation of why we can usually effortlessly continue reading from where we left off.

Kivy, in fact, marvels at how we can experience virtually no narrative discontinuity, even if we take a break of some days from reading (*PR*, p. 108). In his view, this is because 'novels are experienced not as complete, so to speak, but as works in progress, with indeterminate futures for the outcomes' (*OTT*, p. 91). Kivy's solution to the problem complements my Deweyan approach to the issue. There seems to be an experiential continuity, however indeterminate and elusive, between the different phases of reading a novel and a book's mood or atmosphere can, moreover, become one ingredient of our everyday experiential sphere. These are precisely the kinds of quality whose relevance for the general aesthetic character of our everyday lives some everyday aestheticians have defended.³⁹ Along with the performative character of reading and the routines we can build around it analysed earlier in the paper, the gaps between reading a book can also have an interesting import on the aesthetics of our everyday life. Together these takes on everyday reading show that literature is an art which can truly fill our lives in a very literal sense.

V. CONCLUSIONS

I hope to have shown in this article that literature can be a part of our everyday lives in a surprisingly multifarious sense. Some aspects of literature's everyday character are, of course, evident, even without any substantial philosophical reflection. We engage with literature in the most ordinary of places and thanks to recent technological advancements we can carry even novels of substantial length with us effortlessly while performing our everyday routines. In light of this article, the fact that reading literature commonly takes place in an everyday setting is, however, by no means the most interesting aspect of literature's everyday character. For, as shown in the previous section, we can be said to carry the books we are in the middle of reading with us in our everyday lives in

³⁸ Shusterman, 'Thought in the Strenuous Mood', 441.

³⁹ See Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 49–51.

an experiential sense too; the mood or atmosphere of a novel spills over into our everyday experience. Moreover, for the avid reader, for whom a reading moment has become an ingrained part of the everyday, reading is very much one of life's routines. Kivy's analysis of reading as a performance gives a good account for illuminating the value such readers place on reading; it is a recurring silent performance they give to themselves. Reading is also a significant aesthetic performance; the aesthetic aspects of the novel have to be realized in the performance and this can be done more or less properly.

Reading is also a rather unique everyday routine, far surpassing in significance and depth the more mundane routines of our everyday lives. This shows that everyday routines can vary quite markedly with regard to many factors, such as significance and intensity, as well as the concentration and time they require. This is an aspect of routines everyday aestheticians, who emphasize the constitutive role of routines in the everyday, should, in light of this article, explore in great depth. The position of reading literature within everyday aesthetics will no doubt vary with different takes on the concept of the everyday. Whatever one's response is to this conceptual issue, however, to see reading literature as an integral part of the fabric of our everyday life reveals new aspects of value in this aesthetic routine, as well as in routines in general.

Kalle Puolakka

Department of Philosophy, History, and Art Studies, University of Helsinki,
P. O. Box 024, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland
kalle.puolakka@helsinki.fi

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Böhme, Gernot. 'Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics.' Translated by David Roberts. *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993): 113–26.
- Burke, Michael. *Literary Reading, Cognition and Emotion: An Exploration of the Oceanic Mind*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Davies, David. Review of *The Performance of Reading: An Essay in the Philosophy of Literature*, by Peter Kivy. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66 (2008): 89–91.
- Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. 1934. New York: Perigee, 1980.
- Elgin, Catherine Z. 'Art in the Advancement of Understanding.' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (2002): 1–12.
- Haapala, Arto. 'On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place.' In *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, edited by Jonathan M. Smith and Andrew Light, 39–55. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Kivy, Peter. *Once-Told Tales: An Essay in Literary Aesthetics*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Abbreviated: *OTT*.
- . *The Performance of Reading: An Essay in the Philosophy of Literature*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006. Abbreviated: *PR*.

- Leddy, Thomas. 'Experience of Awe: An Expansive Approach to Everyday Aesthetics.' *Contemporary Aesthetics* 13 (2015). <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0013.008>.
- . *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2012.
- Melchionne, Kevin. 'The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics.' *Contemporary Aesthetics* 11 (2013). <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0011.026>.
- Mikkonen, Jukka. *The Cognitive Value of Philosophical Fiction*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Murakami, Haruki. *Men without Women: Stories*. Translated by Philip Gabriel and Ted Goossen. New York: Knopf, 2014.
- Naukkarinen, Ossi. 'Everyday Aesthetics and Everyday Behavior.' *Contemporary Aesthetics* 15 (2017). <https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=802>.
- . 'What Is "Everyday" in Everyday Aesthetics.' *Contemporary Aesthetics* 11 (2013). <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0011.014>.
- Novitz, David. *Knowledge, Fiction, and Imagination*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Puolakka, Kalle. 'Does Valery Gergiev Have an Everyday?' In *Paths from the Philosophy of Art to Everyday Aesthetics*, edited by Oiva Kuisma, Sanna Lehtinen, and Harri Mäcklin, 132–47. Helsinki: Finnish Society of Aesthetics, 2019.
- . 'On Habits and Functions in Everyday Aesthetics.' *Contemporary Aesthetics* 16 (2018). <https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=846>.
- Ribeiro, Anna Christina. Review of *the Performance of Reading: An Essay in the Philosophy of Literature*, by Peter Kivy. *Mind* 118 (2009): 186–90.
- Roth, Philip. *The Plot Against America*. New York: Random House, 2004.
- Saito, Yuriko. *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Aesthetics and World-Making*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- . *Everyday Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Shusterman, Richard. 'Thought in the Strenuous Mood: Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Feeling.' *New Literary History* 43 (2012): 433–54.
- Worth, Sarah E. *In Defense of Reading*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.