EXPANDED AESTHETICS: CARE, ATTENTION, AND THE EVERYDAY PLANT

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersections of care, attention, and aesthetics as they relate to everyday plants, proposing an expanded framework of aesthetic sensibility that moves beyond traditional notions of beauty and attentiveness. Drawing on avantgarde theories and Yuriko Saito's concept of everyday aesthetics, the paper examines two artworks featuring "everyday plants," specifically "weeds" and "houseplants." It demonstrates how these artworks broaden or expand our perception and experience of plants. The paper argues that this "expanded" aesthetic sensibility that entangles historical, political, aesthetic, and economic concerns is emblematic of our climatically changing world. The overall goal of the paper is to uncover current changes in how we look at and understand plants as a culturally constructed category of beings.

KEYWORDS

Planthropocene, Everyday Aesthetics, Care, Biodiversity Crisis, Coloniality, Cultural Danishness

I. CARE, ATTENTION, AND THE EVERYDAY PLANT

In the last decade, the intersecting climate and global biodiversity crisis have fostered a new awareness of the world of plants, which, according to French philosopher Emanuele Coccia, otherwise exist on "the periphery of our cognitive field."[1] According to Japanese philosopher Yuriko Saito, the reason we scarcely notice native plants is that they suffer from an aesthetic disadvantage, being too intertwined with everyday life:[2]

> Things that are familiar to us tend to have aesthetic disadvantages. In the plant world, they are the ones that surround us and with which we interact in our everyday life: the oak tree in the backyard, dandelions growing in the lawn, ivy crawling on the stone wall, a head of cabbage to be used in *pot au feu*, and an onion to be chopped and sautéed. Their all-too-familiar ubiquity and all-too-ordinary appearance elude our aesthetic radar, which is calibrated to capture things that captivate us with out-of-the-ordinary stunning effects. How can a lowly dandelion compete against an orchid plant? Does a cabbage or an onion have a better chance to gain our aesthetic attention than exotic fruits and vegetables?[3]

In response to this common neglect of local plants and the ecological attention they deserve, Saito advocates for "everyday aesthetics." This approach aims to cultivate an aesthetic sensibility toward the most mundane and ordinary plants, contrasting sharply with the twentieth-century Western aesthetic tradition. According to Saito, this tradition has primarily focused on fine arts, grand depictions of nature, and spectacular plants that are uncommon in the local environment, such as orchids.

While it is evident that we need to pay attention to local plants during a biodiversity crisis that, per definition, is local, even though it is a global phenomenon, Saito's and Coccia's analysis also raises further questions. A primary set of questions is concerned with the manner in which we do and do not "see" plants—placing some, like the orchid, at the center of our cognitive field but ignoring or "glossing" others. A second set of questions is concerned with the broader implications of acts of aesthetic appreciation, value, and attention—and with situating them in a broader social, political, and economic landscape, and more specifically, a landscape entangled with colonial histories. Such questions center not only on how we perceive and value plants but also on the social and historical contexts in which such acts of aesthetic perception and valuation take place.

This paper argues that we need to shift the discourse toward a more nuanced exploration of the relationship between the perceiving subject and the perceived plant. It seeks to transform the question of *what* kind of plants we pay attention to into the more qualitative question of *how* we pay attention to them. We explore these questions not to introduce new botanical knowledge but to examine the new—expanded—aesthetic sensibilities of how we view or experience plants in an environmentally degraded world. The following analysis supports its argument by examining two contemporary artworks featuring plants, one by the American artist Meg Webster and one by Congolese artist Sammy Baloji, integrating avantgarde theory on expanded aesthetics with Saito's everyday aesthetics.

II. "I WANT YOU TO CARE MORE"

"I want you to care more,"[4] states the American artist Meg Webster (1944) in a feature on her plant-centred art. In her *Concave Room for Bees* (2016/2017), a small path leads us into the center of a round garden, 22 meters in diameter. Here, one is surrounded by more than 400 cubic yards of soil, reaching six feet high, planted with hundreds of local wild plant species, flowers, herbs, and shrubs that serve as food for, and thus attract, the native pollinating creators. The garden has been presented once in the US at the Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, and once in Denmark by the coastline of Aarhus. By late summer, the colorful patches of flower heads swaying in the soft summer breezes served as a buzzing playground for bees and other pollinators, as a spectacle for the human audience to watch, enjoy, comment on, and discuss, and as an inspiration for new garden aesthetics people might try out at home.[5]

Webster's garden is part of a contemporary art and culture movement that strives to give space to wild plants. Rewilding one's suburban garden has become trendy, and rewilding projects attempt to reintroduce native plants to larger fields of land. Contemporary art includes many other artworks that work with wild plants in similar ways, such as those by the Danish artist Camilla Berner.[6]

This proliferation of wild plants in contemporary art and the broader culture seems to be an excellent example of the "everyday aesthetics" that Saito suggests that centers on unobtrusive, native plants we tend to overlook. Saito's everyday aesthetics is prescriptive in that it is plaidoyer to do something different: To "unearth aesthetic gems hidden in plain sight."[7] Webster's *Concave Room for Bees* may be experienced as an unearthing of aesthetic gems hidden in plain sight.

The unobtrusive everyday native plants we overlook in our suburban gardens, where we call them "weeds" without seeing their ecological context or even knowing their name, are presented *as art* and thus as something that we should pay attention to. Saito writes, "The opportunity for an aesthetic appreciation of nature exists everywhere, in our backyard and kitchen. We don't have to wait for an excursion into unfamiliar surroundings to gain aesthetic inspiration."[8] Artworks such as Webster's Garden are, of course, an example of the "unfamiliar surroundings" Saito mentions. Still, they also hold the potential to prompt us to be more sensitive towards different kinds of beauty, such as the local, native plants that are less bright, with smaller flowers than the typical garden plants.

Expanding on Saito's analysis, we could ask what happens once these plants are circled out (via the artworks) and we pay attention to them. First of all, with the proliferation of wild plants in art and culture, wild plants have become what the French historian of science Bruno Latour would call a "matter of concern." [9] A matter of concern is, in contrast to a matter of fact, not a mere descriptive scientific fact but something that we gather around in our concern for them. In Webster's *Concave Room for Bees,* the audience gathered around the plants and bees within those concerning contexts of the current status of bees, and thus with the subtle dictum to "care more."

Around the same time as *Concave Room for Bees* was constructed news concerning the sudden beehive collapse across Europe and the USA was all over the media. Headlines such as "How can I help the bees?"[10] thus accompanied the presentation of the artwork in Denmark as part of the art museum ARoS exhibition *The Garden: End of Times, Beginning of Times.*[11] At this time, Denmark (just like the US) had experienced a rapid decline in wild bees and other pollinators, with more than 30 % of the known species threatened with extinction or already extinct because of the lack of native plants in the Danish landscape and the use of pesticides.[12] Due to this context around the garden, neither visitors nor the artist knew if there would be any bees. Consequently, the concave room seemed to be a haven in an otherwise barren landscape. With a slight revision of curator and art theorist Grant Kester's vocabulary, *Concave Room for Bees* was what we could call a concrete eco-socio-cultural intervention.[13] With this artwork, and its eco-socio-cultural intervention, the everyday plant, and with it, the everyday pollinators, become the center of our attention. But because of this interspeciary relation that connects plants, bees, and us, our food production, landscape,

and garden design, and so forth, the artwork also stresses *our* precarious lives in a destabilized environment.[14] To stress this fundamental entanglement between us and the plants, the Canadian anthropologist Natascha Myers uses the concept "involution":

> Where evolution describes those longue durée events that find species diverging from one another, involution offers a way to story the ongoing, improvised, experimental encounters that take shape when beings as different as plants and people involve themselves in one another's lives (Hustak and Myers 2012).[15] Involution describes a 'reciprocal capture'[16] that binds plants and people in projects of co-becoming. Turning tropically to one another, plants and people are both in-the-making in sites like gardens.[17]

Myers suggests *Planthropocene* as an "aspirational episteme and way of doing life in which people come to recognize their profound interimplication with plants."[18] She argues that the term *Anthropocene* adds too much agency and control to humans [Anthropos], while *Planthropocene* decenters humans and stresses this fundamental entanglement. Even smaller human-plant encounters are related to global concerns in particular climate change or the biodiversity crisis, because it is in those small actions where we plant, weed, fertilize, or design our gardens or landscape that we build tomorrow's world, as Natasha Myers asserts.

Websters *Concave Room* may be read as such a planthropocene reminder that "our futures hinge on creating livable futures with the plants," as Myers writes.[19] This artwork allows us to experience the everyday plants in their relation to global concerns such as the biodiversity crisis and in its relation to a complex interspeciary involution. The biodiversity crisis is not directedly addressed in the artwork, but it is implied. As philosopher Timothy Morton has suggested, these global environmental phenomena "stick" to our everyday lives, because we are involved in them,[20] and therefore they also stick to these everyday plants.

Saito suggests that art can facilitate an "aesthetic paradigm change" that may hold the potential to counter the neglect of the all-to-familiar by encouraging the viewers to really "see" the familiar plants under a new light.[21] In the analysis above we have have tried to unpack what we see when we look at plants in Meg Webster's artwork. Her *Concave Room for Bees* is a good example of this new aesthetic

paradigm because it brings attention to the otherwise unobtrusive everyday plants. However, this piece also situates the plants in relation to global concerns and interspeciary interdependence with a sense that we, the audience, should care more. With the proliferation of such artworks and other cultural rewilding practices the bees, dandelions, or the "wild urban gardens," have become charged with affect. On the one hand they seem to have become what the British Australian feminist scholar Sarah Ahmed would call "happy objects."[22] On the other hand, these "happy objects" counter the precarious and concerning contexts that are also connected to this new attention to wild plants. In *Concave Room for Bees,* we are asked to "stay with the trouble" because the garden is an intervention into a local ecosystem where wild plants and bees are on the decline, and these are also in a broader scope species our earthly survival depends on.[23] This adds an affective, but also an ethical dimension to the aesthetic objects we see in the context of the artwork. We know that our everyday actions have an impact on human and non-human lives across the globe. Seen from the perspective of the coastline of Aarhus where an audience could experience *Concave Room for Bees* this impact may be hard to notice. It happens on a different scale than our sensory perception in terms of time and place, which is why some have called the current environmental degradations a slow violence.[24] In addition, the landscapes in the global North have already been permanently deteriorated, which makes it harder to notice the current degradations, which is why the American anthropologist Heather Swanson, with reference to Hannah Arendt, talks about a "banal Anthropocene" in the global North.[25] The ethical dimension of Webster's artwork might not necessarily be the first thing the audience experiences. Yet, it is present and impossible to detach from the aesthetic dimension, as a request to care *more*.

In summary, what happens as we experience these plants in the context of Webster's artwork is not merely that we see the plants, pay attention to them or see them as beautiful, so that we will care for them. Rather, the artwork invites us to experience the plants in their interspeciary interdependence and in their connection to global concerns. We suggest that this *expanded aesthetics* experience of plants is a new aesthetic paradigm, a new sensibility, that is a consequence of the global environmental degradations.

Meg Webster sees her artistic practice as a continuation of Minimalism and Land Art.[26] To relocate a material, such as soil and plants, into the art field by presenting it *as* art *is* a quintessential

avantgarde strategy through which an aesthetic relation is established to everyday objects. It is also a (neo) avantgarde strategy to present art as mere objects in the mundane settings of everyday life. To further qualify and explore what this expanded aesthetics may entail, we want to situate it in the historical context of the neo-avantgardes to draw out similarities and differences.

III. THE HORIZONTAL EXPANSION

In 1996, the American art historian Hal Foster revoked the critique of the neo-avantgardes proposed by German avantgarde scholar Peter Bürger.[27] Bürger described the avantgardes as a negation of the institution of art–the category of work or art and the individual production in particular–and in consequence, the neo-avantgardes were regarded as an empty gesture that sedimented the failure of the avantgardes, that the institution of art so readily absorbed.[28] Foster, in contrast, argued that the neo-avantgardes were more than a mere negation of the category of the work of art, and rather a "horizontal expansion"[29] into the social and relational part of the aesthetic object that (high)modernism had suppressed:

> In short, with minimalism, sculpture no longer stands apart on a pedestal or as pure art but is repositioned among objects and redefined in terms of place. In this transformation, the viewer, refused the safe, sovereign space of formal art, is cast back on the here and now; and rather than scan the surface of a work for a topographical mapping of the properties of its medium, he or she is prompted to explore the perceptual consequences of a particular intervention in a given site.[30]

Despite their simplicity, as the minimalistic artworks explored the condition of perception, they made the act of reception reflexive and thus rendered it complex, paving the way for understandings of meaning as something situated and performative, "lodged in the subject"[31], and to the whole new array of phenomenologically oriented "relational" theories, and later artforms that expanded into not just the gallery space, but a wider cultural field.[32]

Following Foster's analysis, we see a similar but radical horizontal and vertical expansion of our current aesthetic field. Rephrasing Foster's analysis, we could say that with Webster's *Concave Room*, the sculptural material no longer "stands apart on a pedestal, or as pure art, but is repositioned among objects and redefined in terms of place." However, Webster's material has not just been relocated

from the pedestal to the floor. Or from the metaphysical space of Art (with a capital A) to the social space of a gallery. Rather, Webster's material is art (re)located on Earth. The soil, the flowers, and we, the audience—are situated in a specific precarious ecology where there might and might not be bees. In addition, in both the American and Danish versions, the audience and the plants are also situated within national contexts within a national landscape that does not favour wild plants or wild pollinators. As such, this artwork intervenes in a specific ecology in the context of a nation within a global biodiversity crisis. It is situated on Earth, because it relates to environmental politics of nations, and *in* it, because it is not detached from Earth's biosphere.[33]

In Foster's terminology, the horizontal refers to the social relation to the audience and the broader cultural field. In the case of Webster's artwork, the "horizontal expansion" does not relate to the social sphere of humans, culture, and meaning-making alone. Rather, it encompasses the more-than-human entanglements in the eco-socio-cultural sphere, in which we are entangled with people we have never met but who are impacted by the global environmental degradations brought about by us in the global north and with a multitude of other species and entities. "The vertical" in Foster's terminology relates to the broader, historical framework of art.[34] In contrast, in Webster's case, the vertical dimension does not refer to art as a historical category. Instead, it refers to the planetary set of problems or perspectives that are relevant to these specific, local, plants. We, the audience, are not just participating in the artwork as an aesthetic gaze or a perceiving body—as the phenomenology of the 1990s would have it. Rather, we are part of Webster's artwork as concerned citizens with ethical and political obligations—and as "earthlings" [35] in the context of global environmental degradation. In comparison to Minimalism, Webster's *Concave Room for Bees* is a further expansion of aesthetics: horizontally to include the more-than-human actors in the ecological space of the artwork. Vertically to include planetary concerns distributed on, and "in" Earth. This means that when we perceive the aesthetic object—the everyday plant—these registers are part of the aesthetic experience.

Foster stresses how a proliferation of new theories of meaning-making and subjectivity, performativity, phenomenology, etc, parallelled the horizontal expansion of the 1960s art scene. In similar ways, our current situation is also followed by new theories that require us to rethink basic categories such as the act of individuation in this

"reciprocal capture" Myers describes as quoted above—and with this, the autonomy of the subject or of "humans" also comes into question, as well a new question of ethics across the global north/south division, and across species boundaries. Meaning-making must be rethought as the material level blends into narrative and mythological levels,[36] as described in the scholarship commonly referred to as New Materialism.[37] If aesthetics is to grapple with these complex changes in how we can perceive objects, we must regard aesthetics as more than a mere question of beauty and attention. It must be about the aesthetic relation between the subject and the object.

IV. HOUSEPLANTS AND THE EVERYDAY "EXOTIC"

Rather than attempting to summarize this entirely new field of thinking and how it challenges conventional ideas of the basic nature-culture distinction, we want to pursue the idea of *expanded aesthetics* as a general, new sensibility that is available in our culture due to global environmental degradation. If it is general, it must, per definition, also apply to the plants those in the global north see as an "exotic" Otherness that is nurtured in our windowsills, where they do not benefit any ecosystem.[38] This invokes the category of houseplants, a subset of the plant world which—nurtured in the intimacy of the home—is especially freighted with social and cultural meanings and values. Can we look at this category of plants in the same way, through the lens of an expanded aesthetics? We want to pursue this question by presenting another example of contemporary art that re-inserts both a global "vertical" and an expanded social "horizontal" perspective upon houseplants by relocating them on earth, similarly to Webster's artwork.

Congolese artist Sammy Baloji's installation *Untitled* (2018) features a range of familiar plants in copper containers, which, on closer examination, are revealed to be cartridge cases from the First World War. The work was presented in 2020 in Lunds Kunsthal, Sweden, and at Kunsthal Aarhus, Denmark, as part of the exhibition *Other Tales*. The exhibition focuses on "the unearthing of 'other' tales—overlooked, suppressed, forgotten—about the Democratic Republic of Congo on the world map. Throughout history, the territories of the Congo have occupied a central, although equivocal and often overlooked, place on the international stage."[39]

To understand the effect of this work in context we need to invoke a particular, situated gaze: the perspective of the ethnically white Dane situated on the inside of what might be described as "cultural

Danishness"—that complex social, political and aesthetic "positionality" that has been in construction since at least the early-nineteenth century. From such a perspective, the plants in the installation are familiar and reassuring houseplants, and the copper vases are the equally familiar cartridge cases used as decorative items in many Danish homes. Anette writes: "We had one in my childhood home, and I easily recognized all Baloji's plants as houseplants, even though I did not know all their names." However, seen from outside of this perspective—for example, from the perspective of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Baloji originates—the same plants represent the nature of the local ecosystem, and along with the copper from which the cartridge cases are made, are part of the natural resources that fuelled colonial political economy—and that continue to fuel capitalist extractivism from the global south. Thus, while this installation is not an intervention into a local eco-socio-cultural site (like Webster's work), it *is* an intervention into an eco-socio-cultural planetary space because the artwork situates all of *us,* as viewers that see the plants from our position in the global north and south, in relation to questions of coloniality and extractivism. The curatorial notes states:

> Such attention to the interconnectedness of events that appear distant in time, space and meaning is a central aspect of Baloji's practice, which seeks to mend ruptures in the colonial timeline while reordering the events it narrates and problematising it by resurrecting pre-colonial knowledge. By adopting a decolonial gaze, Baloji substantially challenges the Eurocentric foundation on which the dominant narrative rests.[40]

Similarly to Webster's artwork, the plants in Baloji's artwork are also situated in a global context that informs our aesthetic experience of them. The plants and the copper objects are presented in the context of Europe's colonial past and present, and the violence of colonial and European wars.

At the same time, the plants are presented as a part of a complex "horizontal" relation. An ethnically white Danish audience may recognize the plants and see them as tokens of archetypical Danish "hygge." The exoticized plants will, in that way, reinforce the sense of national boundaries, which is Edward Said's analysis of exoticism.[41] But the plants are also presented as something else, as entangled social, cultural, political, and economic "objects"—and in this way challenge a normative gaze situated, as it were, at the "inside"

of cultural Danishness. For the possessors of such a gaze, this produces a complex moment of recognition and "knowing." Danish cultural history and "hygge," and the domesticity of the Danish home (complete with the perverse nostalgia of the First World War artillery casing) are situated in relation to a global past and present. This includes a "past" of European and Danish tropical colonialism and their intervention into the societies, territories and ecologies of the global south. More concretely—and arguably more threateningly—it places coloniality at the heart of "cultural Danishness." Not only is the subject at the inside of cultural Danishness confronted with the spectre of Europe's colonial past, but with the coloniality of the present, evidenced in the ways in which they can see and enjoy the plants *without* thinking of their colonial history or country of origin.[42] They can enjoy these plants as an 'exotic' Other, adding an atmosphere to the home that is appealingly "tropical" and unusual while being easily absorbable within the tenants of cultural Danishness.

Before encountering Baloji's artwork, many Danes would not have known that these plants were from the Democratic Republic of Congo. But now with that knowledge, *all* these perspectives are compressed into the present as an expanded aesthetics resulting from what some have called the contemporaneity of our contemporary condition.[43] In this expanded aesthetics, the many temporalities, histories, and spatialities are present as registers through which we experience the aesthetic object. The plant is not just a beautiful form and colour but a compressed social and historical statement or "artefact." The German scholar Martin Seel has described the aesthetic relation as an act of appearing. [44] This metaphor is a useful way of thinking about expanded aesthetics: Expanded aesthetics is the act in which the aesthetic object appears to its viewer in all these expanded perspectives that we might not comprehend fully, but they are there as registers that stick to the experience of everyday objects. We could also call it an "informed" aesthetics because the aesthetic relation is *informed* by everything we know—including the social and political histories in which such works are imbricated. In art, this information is typically available in curatorial notes on the wall or on a website, which is the case in both Baloji's and Webster's artworks. In our everyday lives, this information pops up inconveniently as we mow our lawn, knowing that we also remove the food for bees and other pollinators that are rapidly declining in our local environment, or as we put gasoline in our car, knowing that this fossil fuel culture soon will be obsolete.

V. EXPANDED AESTHETICS

Saito's everyday aesthetics provides a useful foundation for understanding the aesthetic reorientation towards mundane, often overlooked plants. However, as this analysis suggests, the expanded aesthetics of contemporary plant art goes further. It situates plants within a web of global concerns, interspecies relationships, and historical contexts that challenge reductive categorizations such as "houseplants" or "weeds." While Saito succeeds in coining our blindness towards native plants, she forgets that we are equally blind regarding that category described as house plants. They might be here for our aesthetic pleasure; we care for and nurture them and, in a sense, see them when we admire them, but they also serve a purpose. They are subsumed to the needs of the subject, as T.W. Adorno described it in his aesthetic theory.[45] Meaning that we have lost any sense of them as botanical plants in their own rights. Plants that belong to certain ecosystems, certain soil, certain cultures, certain climatic conditions, etc. The gaze we have on the "houseplants" and on the "weeds" is equally reductive, as these are normative categories we have used to explain the role the plants play in our human life: Desired, valued, bought, and sold, or undesired, removable with pesticides or manual labour. These artworks not only prompt a re-evaluation of the aesthetic qualities of plants but also emphasize the deep entanglements between humans across different histories on both sides of the "colonial difference" and between humans and plants, and humans and non-human entities.

An actual rewilding of house plants is impossible within our everyday practices. The plants have been relocated, and they have gone through a process of plant breeding, which means that they might be plants with a very short life span to produce further sales, or they might be hybrids. In all cases many of them no longer fit into their originating ecosystem. But we can rewild how we look at them by seeing them not as "exotic" but exoticized, hybridized, transplanted, bought and sold, living plants that, in their very design, to some degree still mirror the companion species, the soil, the temperature, they belong to as well as the cultural history that brought them into the windowsill. [46]

The argument of this paper is not a practical solution to an ecosystem crisis. Rather, it suggests a descriptive analysis of the current changes in how we look at plants or the possible ways of looking at plants. Plants can now be experienced as complex "eco-socio-cultural-historical-political hybrids" that are always attached to global

concerns and always enmeshed in complex and expanded social and interspeciary relations. This kind of everyday aesthetics does not favor certain plants. It is rather an everyday aesthetic that is sensitive to the fact that everything we do in our everyday lives is connected to events on a global scale and has consequences for other people in other regions and for other species.

The expanded aesthetics outlined in this paper register the complexities of the Planthropocene. This sensibility is exposed, propagated, and nurtured within the field of art, but it is also available as an everyday sensibility. These expanded, informed, or enriched perspectives reveal plants not merely as passive objects of aesthetic appreciation but as dynamic participants in eco-socio-cultural systems, with histories and futures deeply intertwined with our own. We take Myers's notion of "involution" and expand it beyond a consideration of multi-species and more-than-human entanglements and fields of implication to include the "involutions" of coloniality and of the historical relationship between global north and south—an involution which is concrete, historical and ever-present.

VI. WORKING WITHIN AN EXPANDED AESTHETICS

These global or vertical relations and the horizontal, eco-socio-cultural entanglements can be experienced in the present, but as Baloji's piece demonstrates, they also have a history. According to Hal Foster, the new "horizontal" or relational aesthetics of the second half of the 20th century was part of a proliferation of new theories of phenomenology, reception aesthetics, performativity, etc., which could be applied to any aesthetic object from any historical period in and outside the art world. In a similar way, we can take this *expanded aesthetics* of our climatically changing world and apply it to plants inside and outside the art world, and to newer and older cases. With such a gaze, a researcher would explore and unpack how the plants are related to larger global concerns and problematics and how they are embedded in "horizontal" relations between humans and between humans and plants.

Art or art exhibitions could also encourage these sensibilities by offering the audience an expanded, informed, or enriched experience of plants, such as the house plants on our windowsill. This could, perhaps, counter the apocalypse fatigue surrounding environmental issues, as this involves new stories and new perspectives that encompass both scientific information and cultural history, which not only expands our gaze at plants but also enrichens it, by

making it more plentiful.[47] Consequently, expanded aesthetics is not just a description of a new aesthetic sensibility in our climatically changing world. It also offers a way of looking at plants that can be used and operationalized in research, art, curatorial practices, and dissemination activities. It situates aesthetics as a concern related not just to social and cultural life, but also to the fields of history and political economy. More correctly, it suggests that culture and aesthetics are always entangled with historical, political, and economic concerns and relations and with the "shadow" side of modernity: coloniality.

1 Emanuele Coccia: *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture* (Polity Press, 2018), 1. Similar statements are made across a wide range of scholars and artists working with plants, all of which have contributed to the current focus on plants: Michael Marder, *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (Columbia University Press, 2013); Richard Mabey, *The Cabaret of Plants: Forty Thousand Years of Plant Life and the Human Imagination* (Norton & Comp, 2015); Camilla Berner, *Black Box Garden,* Art catalogue (KOPA printing house, 2014); Line Marie Thorsen, ed., *Moving Plants,* Art catalogue (Rønnebæksholm, 2017); *Why Look at Plants?: The Botanical Emergence in Contemporary Art.* (Brill, 2019), accessed January 20, 2025. ProQuest Ebook Central.

2 Yuriko Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics and Plants," in Thorsen, *Moving Plants,* 35-45. When this smaller text is referred and not Saito's broader authorship on everyday aesthetics, it is because she here refers directly to plants and art.

3 Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics and Plants," 35.

4 Out of Sync: "Meg Webster – I want you to care more," interview by Jesper Bundgaard, produced by: Out of Sync and Paula Cooper Gallery, 2016, accessed January 1, 2017, https://youtu.be/PgZhmsiG1X4?si=z-GY9Wn8b-LYQvYG.

5 Anette Vandsø, "The Art of Talking Environment," in Erlend Høyersteen, Jacob V.Sevel, Anne Mette Thomsen and Anette Vandsø (eds.), *The Garden: End of Times, Beginning of Times,* (Köenig Books, 2017), 76-86.

6 Berner, *Black Box Garden*.

7 Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics and Plants," 35.

8 Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics and Plants," 40.

9 Bruno Latour, "Why has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry - Special issue on the Future of Critique* 30, no. 2 (2004): 225-248.

10 Kristian Sjøgren, "Hvad kan jeg gøre for at hjælpe bierne," *Videnskab.dk/Spørg videnskaben*, accessed March 28, 2017, https://videnskab.dk/naturvidenskab/hvad-kan-jeg-goere-for-at-hjaelpe-bierne/.

11 See Høyersteen, Sevel, Thomsen and Vandsø (eds.), *The Garden: End of Times, Beginning of Times*.

12 Jesper Fredshavn, Bettina Nygaard, Rasmus Ejrnæs, et. al, "Bevaringsstatus for naturtyper og arter – 2019. Habitatdirektivets Artikel 17-rapportering," 52 s. Videnskabelig rapport nr. 340, (Aarhus Universitet, DCE – Nationalt Center for Miljø og Energi, 2019). https://dce2.au.dk/pub/SR340.pdf.

13 Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (University of California Press, 2004), 7.

14 This description paraphrases the companion species thought in Haraway: Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto - Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

15 Carla Hustak and Natasha Myers, "Involutionary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters," *differences* 23, no. 3 (2012): 74-118.

16 Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics*, Vol. 1. (University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

17 Natasha Myers, "From the Anthropocene to the Planthroposcene: Designing Gardens for Plant/People Involution," *History and Anthropology* 28, no. 3 (2017): 297.

18 Myers, "From the Anthropocene to the Planthroposcene," 298.

19 Myers, "From the Anthropocene to the Planthroposcene," 299.

20 We are here paraphrasing Timothy Morton on how the global phenomena "stick" to our everyday lives, see: Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after The End of the World* (Minnesota University Press, 2013), 1.

21 Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics and Plants," 37.

22 Sara Ahmed, *Happy Objects, the Promise of Happiness* (Duke University Press, 2010).

23 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble - Making Kin in the Chthulucene,* (Duke University Press, 2016).

24 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

25 Heather Swanson, "The Banality of the Anthropocene," Member Voices, *Fieldsights*, February 22, 2017, accessed feb. 2020, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-banality-of-the-anthropocene.

26 Based on conversation with Webster in Aarhus in 2017. In addition, at Meg Webster's page at the Paula Cooper gallery it says: "In style, Webster's work bridges the conceptual vision of Land Art and the formal vocabulary of Minimalism, with a nod to the utopian ideals of early garden design and urban landscaping," http://viewingroom.paulacoopergallery.com/viewing-room/meg-webster.

27 Hal Foster, The Retur*n of the Real* (MIT Press, 1996).

28 Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980 [1974]).

29 Foster, *The Return of the Real,* xi.

30 Foster, *The Return of the Real,* 38.

31 Foster, *The Return of the Real,* 43.

32 Foster, *The Return of the Real,* 71.

33 Line Marie Thorsen and Anette Vandsø "We Don't Know Where to Land: A Conversation with Latour," in Høyersteen, Sevel, Thomsen and Vandsø (eds.), *The Garden: End of Times, Beginning of Times*.

34 See for instance Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 199.

35 Bruno Latour, "A Plea for Earthly Sciences," in *New Social Connections*: *Sociology's Subjects and Objects*, edited by Judith Burnett, Syd Jeffers and Graham Thomas (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 72. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230274877_5.

36 This is the argument in Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard University Press, 1991).

37 New Materialism would include Karen Barad, Jane Bennet and Rosi Braidotti.

38 We are here referring to the plants Saito calls exotic, Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics and Plants," 37.

39 Matteo Lucchetti, "Introduction," in *Other Tales*, art catalogue (Kunsthal Aarhus, 2020), 16.

40 Lucchetti, "Introduction," 17.

41 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978).

42 As Lucchetti writes: "Coloniality is a factor that is still very alive and active to exclude other knowledge from informing a new shared understanding of things, and perhaps most importantly to create fertile ground for an ongoing exploitation in constantly renewed forms." Lucchetti, "Introduction," 18.

43 Jacob Lund, *Anachrony, Contemporaneity, and Historical Imagination* (Sternberg Press, 2019).

44 This "aesthetics of appearing" refers to Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing* (Stanford University Press, 2010).

45 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Continuum, 2004), 67ff.

46 Giovanni Aloi suggests in similar ways to rewild or to "keep the plants as 'feral' as possible despite them being potted and rooted." See: Giovanni Aloi: "Brief Encounters," in *Why Look at Plants? The Botanical Emergence in Contemporary Art* (Brill, 2019), chapter 10, 232.

47 The authors of this paper are currently working on the research and dissemination project *Hidden Plant Stories* (2023-2026) in a collaboration between Aarhus University, Ordrupgaard and The Hirschsprung Collection, supported by the Velux foundation. In this project such an expanded or enriched perspective is used both to explore *and* exhibit "house plant art."