

Intergenerational aesthetics: A future-oriented approach to aesthetic theory and practice

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Abstract: This article introduces the philosophical subspecialty of intergenerational aesthetics, which centers in the study of aesthetic values and aesthetic choices taking into account the aesthetic appreciation of future generations. Acknowledging a temporal dependency between the present and the future in aesthetics offers a new perspective to explore aesthetic values, perception, and judgments as well as practical aesthetic decisions. This essay discusses the main concerns of intergenerational aesthetics, including its theoretical stakes, its disciplinary and interdisciplinary influences, its normative aspect, and the role of intergenerational thinking in theory and practice. It focuses on aesthetic issues of our surroundings and aesthetic practices that go beyond the classical arts, such as architecture, design, and preservation, as they are directly related to current concerns regarding sustainability and the environment. It presents a specific case to illustrate the pressing importance of introducing intergenerational considerations to our current aesthetic practices. It ends by proposing a series of potential avenues of research for further investigations in the field.

Keywords: Intergenerational aesthetics; intergenerational thinking; applied aesthetics; aesthetic sustainability; aesthetics of lived environments.

1. Introduction

Intergenerational aesthetics is a relatively new subspecialty in the academic field of philosophical aesthetics. It centers in the study and examination of aesthetic values and aesthetic decisions bearing in mind not just the present, but taking into account future generations. Intergenerational aesthetics is therefore not only concerned with interpersonal and synchronic issues, but rather with intergenerational and diachronic ones. Acknowledging a temporal dependency between the present and the future in aesthetics offers a new perspective to explore aesthetic values, perception, and judgments as well as practical aesthetic decisions. Including intergenerational concerns to the aesthetic discussion entails reexamining central issues raised in traditional

aesthetics, such as the universality of aesthetic values and the conditions of both aesthetic judgment and aesthetic perception. These theoretical questions have practical consequences: whether aesthetic values are permanent or, on the contrary, change over time, affects the way in which we currently conceive and make our aesthetic choices, as these do not only have an impact on our current aesthetic perception but also on the range of aesthetic evaluation of future generations. Intergenerational aesthetics, thus, has a normative component both in theory and in practice, as it is concerned with aesthetic obligations towards future generations. Intergenerational aesthetics also aims at overcoming traditional separations between art and nature, lived and non-lived environments, temporal and atemporal, theory and practice. To do so, it takes a highly intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach and aims at contributing to current debates in aesthetics as well as in discussions on sustainability, preservation, the environment, and urban development.

The study of aesthetic issues of our surroundings from an intergenerational point of view stems from a pressing concern regarding our present situation in terms of environment and sustainability, as our current exploitation, building, and living practices seem clearly unsustainable in the long run. Most recent data show that the construction sector is “responsible for almost 40% of energy- and process-related emissions” (IEA 2019: 3) and reducing them is crucial to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. Add to this the fact that “we are running out of space” (Harries 2017), i.e., that there is a relatively limited amount of space that can be used to erect new buildings, even though these represent a small share of building activity globally: 1% in Finland, or 3% in Singapore, for instance. This entails that new constructions should be designed to last longer and that the majority of urban and architectural interventions consist mainly of preservation, restoration, and destruction, rather than building on an empty space. Consider the lifespan of a building: currently, calculations of the average operational lifetime of a building set it at 50 years, as compared to the 120-year lifespan of a building conventionally built with masonry and wood, the 60-year lifespan of a modernist building using reinforced concrete and glass curtain walls, or even the 25 or 30-year span of some buildings recently built in China. Office buildings in the US are built with a 30-year life expectancy because this is the length of mortgages: buildings are designed so that the initial costs are the lowest and sustainability concerns are not part of the equation. Current sustainability building practices are working to increase buildings’ lifespans to at least 120 years, which is relatively short compared to the lifespan of other structures from ancient and medieval times (Marsh 2017; Palacios-Munoz *et al.* 2019; Qian 2010; Rybczynski 2015). These shorter lifespans entail the necessity of demolishing buildings to build new

ones from scratch or engage in costly maintenance, preservation, and restoration procedures.

All these processes of construction, destruction, and preservation have aesthetic consequences, as they determine the appearance of our surroundings and our subsequent aesthetic appreciation. Even more, aesthetic issues may be the main cause for demolition: Palacios-Munoz *et al.* state that 44% of buildings surveyed in their study were demolished because of “subjective perception” (2019: 2). If the possibility of changes in taste is not accounted for, then some structures that would have been appreciated in the future may be demolished, as happens with numerous cases of brutalist architecture. Intergenerational aesthetics aims at including aesthetic aspects to the debate and at influencing actual practice by considering also those aspects that have yet to be articulated, since it is unknown how future generations will aesthetically appreciate their environment. Taking into account the potential future appearance and aesthetic perception of what is currently built, restored, and planned opens the door to or, at the very least, does not foreclose from the getgo aesthetic appreciation and judgment in the future.

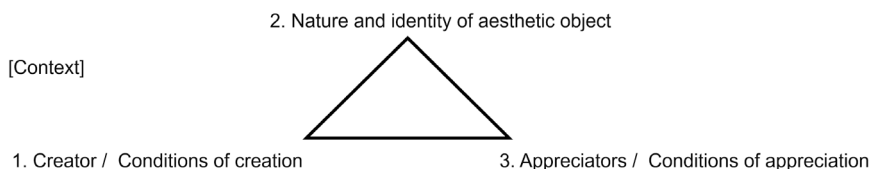
This essay first introduces the main theoretical stakes of intergenerational aesthetics, discusses its object of study, its intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary connections, and proposes a set of basic principles with normative character that should be considered in current aesthetic practices illustrated with examples. Second, it discusses intergenerational thinking as it relates to aesthetic values and aesthetic practices, drawing upon intergenerationality in other fields, specifically intergenerational ethics. Third, it discusses the process of preservation of the Finlandia Hall, showing how intergenerational aesthetics engages in practice. It finally offers a series of possible paths for further research.

2. *The theoretical stakes of Intergenerational Aesthetics*

2.1. General Context and Disciplinary Genealogy

The fundamental tenet of intergenerational aesthetics is that of including the potential aesthetic appreciations, experiences, and judgments of future generations to the current aesthetic reflection and practice. The focus is primarily on future aesthetic appreciators, which prompts us to rethink the present role and status of aesthetic objects and creators. Take the aesthetic triad that constitutes the subject matter of aesthetics:¹

¹ This is a slightly modified scheme from the one in Kieran (2006: 6).



Focusing on future appreciators and their potential conditions of appreciation includes temporality to this scheme and shifts the aesthetic discussion from issues of intentionality and creation to aesthetic reception, experience, and interpretation. It also brings us to consider the features of aesthetic objects from the perspective of future appreciators, which many entail to rethink their perdurance and include sustainability aspects. Additionally, the role of creators may be altered if their task is seen as shaping future aesthetic appreciation.

The object of study of intergenerational aesthetics is not just that of traditional philosophy of art that focuses on art and artworks. Rather, it considers aesthetic aspects of our surroundings, thus enhancing classical aesthetic questions to the entirety of our lived environment. Following the recent approaches of environmental and everyday aesthetics, intergenerational aesthetics discusses aesthetic aspects within this larger framework and examines arts that have been generally disregarded in the traditional philosophy of art because of their practical functions, such as architecture, urbanism, public art, and design. In that way, it also blurs the traditional distinction between the aesthetic appreciation of art and that of nature and challenges clear-cut theoretical distinctions. Like environmental and everyday aesthetics, intergenerational aesthetics includes everybody to the aesthetic discussion, not solely experts, and considers everyday interactions and the way we live and experience our surroundings to be central. Public discussions on aesthetic issues already show how this type of intergenerational deliberation is taking place, but the philosophical and aesthetic academic tradition has not focused on this aspect of aesthetic choices and values as clearly as it could have.

From a disciplinary perspective, intergenerational aesthetics builds upon several branches of aesthetics and philosophy as well as other disciplines concerned with intergenerationality. In philosophy in general, it draws upon and shares common research topics with:

- *Environmental aesthetics*: the aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic features of natural environments, including those influenced by humans, thus breaking with the traditional distinction between aesthetic appreciation of human-made art and that of non-human influenced nature. In

addition to these, contemporary environmental aesthetics focuses on environmentalism and sustainability, including pressing issues such as climate change and environmental degradation (Berleant and Brady 2014; Carlson 2000; 2020).

– *Aesthetics of everyday life*: expansion of the scope of environmental aesthetics to examine any kind of objects and activities in everyday life that take place in non-artistic environments. It also goes beyond traditional aesthetic categories and explores negative aesthetic features and aspects derived from quotidian usage and interaction (Saito 2007; 2014; 2017; 2019).

– *Applied aesthetics*: The definition of applied aesthetics is not straightforward. Davies (2016) discusses the applicability of the notion of “applied” to aesthetics and shows how the traditional distinction in other fields between pure and applied does not quite fit in the case of aesthetics and that in the philosophy of art all explorations could be considered applied as they explore actual practices. Applied aesthetics refers also to the study of aesthetic values that engages in interdisciplinary research or collaboration with professions outside academic philosophy that deal with practical aesthetic issues (International Institute of Applied Aesthetics). Reflecting on aesthetic-values-in-the-making sheds light to the temporal dimension of aesthetics. Here, intergenerational aesthetics is considered an applied field as it is concerned with actual practice and how aesthetic choices may influence aesthetic values and judgments of future generations.

– *Urban aesthetics and philosophy of the city*: Urban aesthetics considers the aesthetic experience of the built environment as a whole, going beyond the appreciation of single buildings, public art, or specific designs and centers on the lived experience and appreciation of both inhabitants and visitors (Berleant 1986; Berleant and Carlson 2007; Blanc 2013; Lehtinen 2020b; Paetzold 2012). Urban aesthetics builds upon aesthetics of the natural environment and uses a broader methodology to study aesthetic phenomena in the city. The philosophy of the city explores the city in all of its dimensions: political, social, cultural, environmental, epistemological, metaphysical, ethical, aesthetic issues. It often includes a normative aspect, as it engages with applied philosophy and ethics (Philosophy of the City Research Group; Meagher & al. 2020; Lehtinen 2020e).

– *Aesthetics of preservation practices*: Restoration and reproduction of artworks is discussed in relation to work identity and authenticity, focusing on differences between original, copies, reproductions, fakes, and forgeries (Goodman 1968: 99-123; Dutton 1983). It also addresses how such interventions affect the artists’ intentions, aesthetic experience, and the

works' meanings and interpretations (Capdevila-Werning 2013; 2014b; 2017; Capdevila-Werning and Spaid 2019).

– *Environmental ethics and intergenerational justice*: Environmental ethics is interested in the future people in terms of intergenerationality and sustainability (International Society for Environmental Ethics) and focuses on intergenerational ethical values in terms of the obligations to future generations (Brennan and Lo 2020). Intergenerational justice focuses on whether and in which ways justice concerns are applicable to relations between non-contemporaries (Meyer 2020). Environmentally informed intergenerational concerns have gained more importance since the broad temporal span of the consequences of global climate change have become apparent.

Intergenerational aesthetics also considers the research and concerns addressed in the fields of sustainability studies, climate change ethics, heritage studies, historic preservation, and landscape preservation, among others.² Each of these deals with intergenerational concerns and may also consider aesthetic aspects. The unique contribution of intergenerational aesthetics is that it puts aesthetic concerns at the center of theoretical and practical debates; it explores how these matter so that they may exert influence on decisions that go beyond the immediate aesthetic appearance and how such appearance is appreciated by current audiences.

2.2. Cognitive and Normative Aspects

The claim of putting intergenerational aesthetic concerns at the center acquires a broader significance if we consider that aesthetics is mainly a cognitive endeavor.³ Following Goodman, we take the objects of aesthetic appreciation as symbols that convey meaning. These aesthetic features grant unique cognitive access to our surroundings, convey meaning, and are open to interpretation (Goodman 1968; 1976; Goodman and Elgin 1988; Elgin 2017; Capdevila-Werning 2014a). That aesthetic experience is cognitive does

² The research undertaken in these fields is vast and varied. Each of them has a specific terminology, theoretical and methodological framework, diverse questions, and practical concerns; addressing them is beyond the scope of this essay. Some specific references are nevertheless provided in Section 4 on practical cases, with the purpose of showing how intergenerational aesthetics engages with the concerns similar to the ones in these fields of research.

³ There is an extensive tradition and literature centering in epistemology and art (Schellekens 2014). We build upon Nelson Goodman's conception according to which "the arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of advancement of the understanding" (Goodman 1976: 102) and maintain the constitutive role of interpretation in determining a work's meaning and metaphysical status (Goodman and Elgin 1988: 44-45; Danto 1964).

not mean that it cannot be pleasurable or unpleasurable or that it excludes feelings and emotions. Rather, it means that feelings and emotions are already cognitive. Together with our senses and any other prior knowledge, understanding, and experiences we have, we engage in a cognitive process of interpreting what surrounds us, creating meaning, and gaining understanding of the world and also of ourselves.

Consider one's possible aesthetic experience of Palladio's Villa Rotonda: we perceive the building and its surroundings with our senses, carry with us our knowledge of Renaissance architecture, our excitement or any other mood, perhaps recall a previous visit; all these intermingle in our experience of the Villa and contribute to our interpretation. Being placed on an elevated plinth, after climbing the garden stairs, the Villa appears in front of us in its perfect axial symmetry, conveying a mathematical concept architecturally. Inside, we further experience mathematical proportions: the ground floor is a square that corresponds to a 1:1 ratio, the rectangular rooms at each corner correspond to a 2:1 ratio (two double squares), its adjacent smaller rectangular rooms a 3:4 (a square plus its third). This understanding acquired through the Villa's aesthetic experience is unique. Our spatial experience of proportions varies from a musical one, from which we may learn about the unique harmonies of such ratios: a unison - when two strings of the same length vibrate (1:1), an octave - when two strings one twice as long as the other vibrate (2:1), and a perfect fourth - when the relation between two strings is 3:4. While we can describe these experiences, something is lost when translated into propositional knowledge; ways of understanding are not interchangeable. From an intergenerational perspective, then, aesthetic decisions have epistemological consequences as well, as they determine not only the possibilities of perception, but also the cognitive access of future generations.

Given the importance of what is at stake with intergenerational concerns, intergenerational aesthetics includes an essential normative component and proposes a set of general principles or guidelines that should be taken into account, especially in practice:

- Aesthetic decisions made in the present should not foreclose future aesthetic judgment, experience, attribution of values, nor limit the possibilities of interpretation and meaning.
- Aesthetic decisions should maintain access to existing aesthetic values and taste, but not impose one's aesthetic worldview to future generations.
- Aesthetic decisions should also aim at non-deception and at seeking truthfulness whenever possible.

To do so, one should consider the potential future appearance of that which is currently decided upon, be it a new project, a reconstruction, preser-

vationist intervention, and also demolition, destruction, or ruined state. This may require an act of creative imagination and the acknowledgment that not everything can be controlled nor determined, as garden preservation (Salwa 2019; 2020) or unintended results in rewilding projects (Prior and Brady 2017) show. The passing of time and its effect on aesthetic features should also be acknowledged - as the Premios Década in Spain, which awarded the best architecture a decade after the construction had been finished did.⁴ The passing of time should also be acknowledged from the appreciators' standpoint, since it seems evident that taste and what is aesthetically valued evolves, and making decisions considering that our current aesthetic taste and values are permanent or even universal affects the aesthetic perception of future generations. Theoretically, intergenerational aesthetics challenges established theories on the universality of aesthetic value and taste and opens the door to rethink traditional conceptions in aesthetics and reframe questions regarding relativism especially considering pressing environmental and sustainability issues. To avoid imposing present aesthetic taste and preferences, intergenerational aesthetics considers all sorts of aesthetic values, positive and negative, since what is considered a positive value now may not be so in the future, as our current aesthetic judgments regarding some fashion and stylistic choices from the past illustrate. Intergenerational aesthetics takes into account the possibility of aesthetic obsolescence and the possibility of such obsolescence turning into desirability in the future.

All these normative claims have practical outcomes and the guidelines of intergenerational aesthetics provide us with criteria to assess aesthetic choices and decisions. Several design practices, such as architecture, urban planning, product design, and fashion are introducing "aesthetic sustainability" (Harper 2018) to their productions and consider intergenerationality in the design. This may entail adaptability and modular constructions in architecture so that usage and aesthetic appearance can be modified according to future appreciators, consider how time will affect materials and appearance, or select more lasting and sustainable materials considering their aesthetic features, not just functional ones. According to our proposed intergenerational criteria, aesthetic decisions made taking into account future generations do not need to generate identical aesthetic outcomes nor be equally appropriate: modularity as a design principle in architecture and adaptability projects contribute to designing structures that will last longer as they provide a re-

⁴ The prize was established by Oscar Tusquets and was awarded from 2000 to 2009: <http://www.tusquets.com/fundacion-otb/premios-decada/10-anos-de-arquitectura-en-barcelona> (last accessed 10th November 2020).

sponse to the uncertainty of not knowing the needs or preferences of future generations. They also open the possibility of aesthetic choices and grant the freedom to choose, albeit from a relatively limited range of possibilities, and thus do not foreclose aesthetic appreciation nor the possibility of change in taste since a project's inception. In contrast, designs made considering that aesthetic values are universal do foreclose appreciation and, despite taking into account future generations, are not intergenerational. Such designs are created from the premise that aesthetically sustainable objects are those that fulfill a series of specific qualities (harmony, symmetry, minimalism, timelessness, made of lasting and timeless materials) (Harper 2018) and hence do not account for the possibility of a change in taste.

Intergenerational considerations are also relevant in the fields that work on preserving, recovering, or maintaining the past of the present for the future, such as historic preservation, heritage studies, and geoheritage. While such disciplines certainly consider the passing of time in their theoretical reflection and practices, introducing intergenerational considerations provides a new temporal dimension, because in addition to looking backward from the future to our time as heritage does, intergenerational aesthetics proposes to include the future in our present aesthetic reflection and practices. This is especially important in urban geosites, which are intrinsically intergenerational entities where livability and aesthetic aspects converge (Capdevila-Werning 2020).

Intergenerational guidelines offer criteria to decide upon preferable preservationist interventions, as the following examples show. Preferability may be also assessed in terms of symbolic functioning of preserved structures (Capdevila-Werning 2014b), as it is argued that one of the main roles of restoration is to preserve symbolic functioning (Elgin 1997) and, consequently, at an epistemological level, preserve cognitive access. In historic preservation, interventions can be assessed according to their role in fostering truthfulness and avoiding deception (Capdevila-Werning 2013). Less invasive practices like cleaning and maintenance may seem straightforward means to grant access to aesthetic properties that had been obscured by dirt, but maintaining the status quo or bringing back the original appearance may not always be preferable, as it erases the patina of time and multiple aesthetic properties and subsequent appreciations, judgments, and potential interpretations as well. A clear case of this would be when the patina of certain materials is removed, which alters its aesthetic properties (Kalakoski 2016); consider what happens when bronze is cleaned to its initial grey appearance and all the green tonalities that it acquires with time are erased.

From an intergenerational perspective, making the interventions visible - as

happens with archaeological restorations that show the non-original prosthetic additions - is preferable to integral restorations, which bring structures back to its original appearance without providing perceptible hints to point that, in fact, it is not an original. But in some cases an integral restoration may be preferable, as the cultural and social significance of a structure may outdo the claims for non-deception: consider the rebuilding of cities, downtowns, or significant places in Europe after World War Two, where reconstruction to the state before the war helped heal the wounds and reunite the people. Other preservationist interventions create palimpsests: layers of matter that show the passing of time and the history of a place. This seems to be the most truthful intervention possible as deception is avoided and interpretative possibilities remain open. There are however exceptions, as happens in the intervention of the Neues Museum in Berlin, where layers of matter that had never been shown are visible and simultaneously certain existing layers were erased so that parts of the site's history are left untold; instead of truthfulness, deception takes place (Capdevila-Werning 2015).

Lastly, total reconstructions may entail not simply a faithful process but an act of creative imagination that brings back a building to a stage that had never existed in any given time, therefore altering future aesthetic perception irremediably, as is the case of some of Violet-le-Duc's interventions (Capdevila-Werning 2012; 2013). A similar issue of altering future aesthetic perception and foreclosing interpretation happens with copies or reproductions that aim at complete faithfulness, but whose aesthetic features are not exactly identical to that of the original construction, as happens with the 1986 reproduction of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion. Here the reproduction is a built interpretation of a 1929 original structure that retrospectively determines the meanings of the original and has an impact on the history of the building and modern architecture in general (Capdevila-Werning 2017).

Intergenerational aesthetics aims at maintaining aesthetic appreciation open to future generations, but the passing of time also entails that things may be lost forever. This may not always be a negative outcome, as focussing too much on the past and the present may foreclose future options. In such cases, a project of descriptive aesthetics, which documents aesthetic experiences of disappearing environments contributes to documenting and archiving to indirectly preserve and grant access to them (Berleant 1992: 25-39).

3. Intergenerational thinking and aesthetic values

Environmental ethics and social philosophy explicitly formulate intergenerational thinking through the concepts of intergenerational ethics and justice

(Meyer 2020). In aesthetics, despite being implicitly present in several discussions, it has not yet been fully articulated. While intergenerational ethics focuses on the type and degree of responsibility towards non-contemporaries, mainly the future generations of people, similar considerations towards the aesthetic preferences and values of the future generations have not been prevalent in aesthetic theory. In a way, intergenerational aesthetics creates a new bridge between ethics and aesthetics, one that shares the same pressing concerns in terms of sustainability and the environment, allows the exploration of values and obligations towards future generations, and hopes to enact changes in practice.

Take a practical situation from intergenerational ethical and aesthetic perspectives. Concerns regarding the ecological sustainability of human designs put more emphasis on the designs' temporal dimensions. But the durability of materials or structures is not sufficient to warrant sustainability of the design itself, unless the aesthetic features have either a long-lasting or an adaptable quality. In environmental aesthetics, aesthetic value has been most notably sought in relation to scientific knowledge (Carlson 2020). The strongest normative theories leave only limited space for subjective differences in preferences and the change in values is present in the form of a learning process: one unlearns to like that which is bad for the environment and starts preferring those aesthetic features and phenomena that support the overall ecology of the environment in question. The intergenerational nuances of this unlearning and learning process begin to appear in the descriptions of everyday environmental preferences, such as when green pesticide- and herbicide-ridden lawns lose their aesthetic luster in favor of ecologically sounder wild meadows (Saito 2007). Thinking towards the future requires a perspectival shift in aesthetics: the basic elements of discussion, such as aesthetic values or qualities do not change, but change takes place in how these elements are defined, interpreted, and used, both in philosophical and applied aesthetics as well in practice. Here, we bring together the main claims regarding intergenerational thinking as they relate to aesthetics: environmental concerns, aesthetic values, and the perspective of ethics and aesthetics of care.

Intergenerational aesthetics draws upon the outcomes from other relevant contemporaneous approaches in philosophy. Environmental ethics offers an important parallel discourse, as the notion of intergenerationality has been central in discussions regarding sustainability, climate change, and justice. Intergenerational justice centers on the ethical deliberation of the current range of human activities as they affect the living conditions of future generations of humans and non-humans alike. Here, the focus on temporal processes entails the tenet that current generations have a responsibility or even obligations to-

wards future generations. Another parallel discourse that engages in the study of intergenerational values is found in social philosophy; its main claim is that there are several approaches to the relationship between non-contemporaries. A distributive justice framework, for example, can be used to solve conflicts of interest between different generations (Meyer 2020).

Environmental aesthetics brings together intergenerational thinking with aesthetic values by discussing temporality and future aesthetics in the context of climate change (Brady 2014). This research underlines how the intergenerational perspective requires acknowledging the inevitable imbalance of power between generations, because the change precipitated by contemporary activity has long-lasting effects on the future environment and its appearance. The temporal asymmetry is sometimes juxtaposed to a geographical asymmetry, as the production responsible for temporal changes in environments often occurs in places geographically distanced from the place where products are used (Naukkarinen 2011). Stone, for example, is excavated in open quarries far away from where it is going to be used for paving streets or covering facades. Streets and buildings have their own lifespans, but quarries irreversibly change the appearance of their landscapes. The notion of distributive justice is relevant to the intergenerational approach of environmental aesthetics as the concept of “loss and damage” is used to unravel how environmental change affects landscapes near and far: entire islands and, with them, cultures are disappearing because of anthropogenic climate change. Light (2018) emphasizes how non-economic losses are especially significant for intergenerational aesthetics.

A relevant conceptual context for intergenerational aesthetics is the so-called “sustainable development” - the sustainability framework and its future-directed approach to intergenerational relations first formulated by the Brundtland Report in 1987. Its general aim is to cultivate such practices that do not compromise “the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brennan and Lo 2020). Sustainable development has been criticized because of its ties to economic growth, as opposed to other approaches that emphasize the role of human action in reaching more sustainable systems. In recent years, the sustainability framework has developed into a broad and fast-developing multidisciplinary research area, which emphasizes the necessity of sustainable transitions or transformations to secure the harmonious and equal coexistence of human and non-human worlds.

For aesthetics, the implications of the sustainability framework require rethinking the role of aesthetic values in this process (Lehtinen 2020a; 2021) and to think at the intersection of aesthetics and sustainability. Intergenerational thinking serves here to reflect upon how and in which ways aesthetic values change and to what extent can human activity take this change into consider-

ation. Besides more pragmatic concerns related to design, aesthetic sustainability centers precisely in examining how well and in which ways aesthetic qualities are related to intergenerational fluctuations in taste (Lehtinen 2020a). Introducing the test of time perspective recognizes and underlines the temporal reach of aesthetic qualities: not everything is aesthetically durable and what is valued also changes. Sometimes this change can be anticipated, but is often unexpected. Aesthetic sustainability helps “to better understand how urban futures unfold experientially and how aesthetic values of urban environments develop with time” (Lehtinen 2020a: 111). In the context of architecture, the concept is a valuable tool for assessing the intergenerational relations between the users of the spaces and the overall change in aesthetic values (Lehtinen 2020c; 2020d).

An especially important part of the intergenerational approach to aesthetics is to see its relevance as a socially shared and collective project. Intergenerational aesthetics assumes a more diverse, decentralized, and equitable notion of what counts as an aesthetic value. The “right to beauty” is not easily defined, even though the objectivity of aesthetic values is still strongly implied in governments or authorities responsible for building regulations. For example, the Finnish law concerning land use and the built environment states that the law’s objective is the “protection of the beauty of the built environment and of cultural values” (Land Use and Building Act, 1991 with an amendment from 2003). Regarding building maintenance, it states that “[b]uildings and their surroundings must be kept in a condition that meets standards of health, safety and fitness for use at all times and does not cause environmental harm or damage the beauty of the environment” (Finlex 1999/2003). “Beauty” is mentioned altogether five times in the law, but a more precise definition or criteria for assessing are largely missing and, of course, they have been open to various interpretations throughout the years. Aesthetic preferences refer to those instances in which choice between two or several options is possible. Aesthetic choices are present in our everyday life on an individual level (Naukkarinen 1998; Melchionne 2017) and they are also present also in intergenerational decision-making processes.

The intergenerational perspective allows us to grasp change in the appreciation of aesthetic values. These values change over time differently than “merely” ecological and environmental values, which can take a more sudden turn when e.g. a breakthrough in scientific knowledge is introduced to the wider public. Change in aesthetic values is not necessarily negative and the intergenerational approach explains the process of aesthetic habituation: it describes how we become accustomed to aesthetically entirely new things or how we react to changes in that which is already aesthetically familiar

to us. An initially considered aesthetic loss in a landscape might become aesthetically positive for future generations. Take wind turbines, which have been lately gaining acceptance and some even consider sublime or otherwise aesthetically pleasing instead of eyesores in a landscape (Saito 2004; 2007: 67, 96-102).

Intergenerational thinking in aesthetics may include the notion of care. Instead of focusing on mere obligations, introducing care towards the future people entails a radically different relation to them, one that requires acknowledging different conditions and affirming the provisional independence of future generations (Groves 2014). Recent research on the aesthetics of care shows how the notion of care formulated in feminist ethics has significant points of contact with aesthetic values (Saito 2020). In aesthetics, care entails attending and respecting the singularity of an object, not imposing preconceived standards or ideals, and being respectful, considerate, and open-minded in one's engagement with the object of attention. Paying close attention to nuances and competing narratives as well as suspending one's judgment are also involved in the care approach. However, even with careful attention as the guiding approach, the direction of change in aesthetic values cannot be predetermined. Aesthetic deliberation is an important part of any design process, yet the futurity of aesthetic values cannot be entirely designed either. Trend forecasts and predictions can estimate the direction of future aesthetic preferences, but aesthetic values also take unexpected and even sudden turns according to changes in politics, social movements, and other societally or personally important events.⁵

4. *Intergenerational aesthetics in practice*

The discussion of the Finlandia Hall illustrates intergenerational aesthetics in practice, showing how a temporal change in values takes place and what type of factors play a part over the lifespan of an individual building. Architecture and the built environment constitute an especially interesting field for developing and testing the idea of intergenerational aesthetics, as they combine functionality with the approaches of the philosophy of art, environmental and urban aesthetics, and heritage discourse. The value of architectural objects derives from their use and other values and meanings beyond their aesthetic appeal. This interplay of different values offers an

⁵ A further direction of potential inquiry is for example the role of nostalgia in the development of aesthetic values (Boym 2001). The implications of the global Covid-19 pandemic to changes in aesthetic values is also an interesting area of further study.

opportunity to observe and assess the ensuing intergenerational changes and fluctuations in taste and appreciation. As brutalist architecture shows, change in aesthetic values can happen in the span of a few decades and something which lost its aesthetic value can regain it in the eyes of another generation. The interlinked ecological, ethical, and social values might be different for the current-day admirers of brutalist architecture, but the aesthetic appreciation arises mostly by the same qualities present when the buildings were new. Thus the perceptual qualities do not change, but fluctuation takes place in how these qualities are responded to, which reinforces our claim that aesthetics has an essential cognitive element.

The Finlandia Hall, designed by Alvar Aalto (1898-1976) in the early 1960s and dedicated in 1971, is a prominent building in the Helsinki cityscape and widely recognized as a significant piece of 20th century architecture. The building served as a concert hall until the early 2000s, when the larger and acoustically better Music Centre was finished in its vicinity. It is now a multifunctional space for meetings and events. Since the beginning, the white carrara marble slates used in the main facade started to show signs of wear. The harsh climate took its toll on the material in unexpected ways, causing the marble slates to curve, fray, and crumble in the edges only five years after the building's dedication (HS 1996). The marble had to be replaced for the first time in 1998, approximately twenty years earlier than anticipated. Besides the massive expenses, the ecological consequences were significant, but the discussion in the 1990s revolved around the costs of the operation and the importance of staying true to Aalto's original plans, not sustainability concerns.

Although some entirely new design ideas for replacing the facade material were presented already in the 1990s, the public discussion on the first renovation of the Finlandia Hall quickly dismissed the option of replacing the delicate material with a more durable one because of heritage and aesthetic reasons and centered mainly on the architect's original intentions. Allegedly it was even proposed (or joked) that the corrosion of the material was Aalto's original intention and that the fraying material should be left as is. Crumbling marble slates, however, started to fall and posed a safety hazard in addition to the massive effect on the overall building's appearance. Despite this obvious design flaw, the common ethos was still clearly against changing Aalto's original design. The national media reported that the original material had been chosen "based on its aesthetics" (YLE 2020), even knowing that the durability of the material was equally poor and that the next renovation had to be planned for the early 2020s. Resorting to aesthetic features as the main reason to choose an unsustainable material signals a specifically designer-oriented, intergeneration-

ally insensitive, and tone-deaf understanding of aesthetics which reflects the overall ethos of the time.

As predicted, the slates installed in 1998 deteriorated fairly quickly and their renovation will now take place in 2022-24. This time the choice of materials included alternatives, like ceramic and composite materials, whose durability and color were examined at length. However, the chosen material ended up being a new, more durable marble type with aesthetic qualities of color and pattern similar to the original carrara marble.⁶ The decision favored stone material over other, more radical options, being also the most expensive alternative. While the change in the facade material did not divert radically from the original design, the discussion and options presented show an important shift in the overall decision-making process. The second time around, the discussion was more open and took place from an intergenerational perspective. Between the two renovations, the status and function of the building had changed. This might have taken some pressure off the design choices, as the overall cultural value of the building shifted given the change in its function. The historical value started to dominate with the result that the interpretation or emphasis of the aesthetic value of the place changed. This opened up the possibility of alternative proposals based on factors other than aesthetic ones, thus signaling a shift in the hierarchy of values: from Aalto's original intentions to concerns regarding sustainability and endurance. Considering the proposed intergenerational criteria, aesthetic experience and interpretation of the Finlandia Hall was preserved so that future generations could access it as it had been in the past, and sustainability concerns were partially solved by selecting a material with a longer life span. Perhaps another, more sustainable option, would have been able to preserve such original appearance and, at the same time, reflect the passing of time and current intergenerational concerns: a less expensive, longer-lasting, environmentally-friendly material with an aesthetic appearance similar to the carrara marble without the pretense of being original might have been a possibility.

Besides showing how change in aesthetic values takes place, this case also exemplifies how expert- or designer-oriented aesthetics has given space to a more open form of aesthetic deliberation. The renovation options were articulated better in the public discussion and the decision-making process was more democratic than in the earlier renovation process. However, the principle of openness could have been brought further: the material options under con-

⁶ In June 2020, it was decided that the new facade material would be Lasa Bianco Nuvolato marble. The new material is estimated to "endure any weather" (YLE 2020) and last at least for the next 50 years, instead of the 20 year lifespan of the more delicate Carrara marble in this particular use.

sideration were exhibited on the roof of the Finlandia Hall to a select group of experts, but the selection was not openly accessible to the public, nor was there the possibility for citizens to vote for their preferred material. In terms of intergenerational thinking, the decision to replace the marble with a more durable stone could be interpreted to be a conservative compromise between the old, designer-oriented aesthetic values and new, sustainability-favoring aesthetic values.

As the case of the Finlandia Hall makes clear, the time span between the building design, the finalization of the plans, and the actual end of construction is usually long. This lag might not have been as significant in preceding centuries, but nowadays the fast-growing knowledge and criteria for sustainability are precipitating the processes of evaluating and re-evaluating the desirability of building solutions. This applies also to the aesthetic qualities as they are directly connected to the sustainability of many of the design choices. Small windows, for example, although not an intuitive aesthetic choice, became an aesthetic norm as a sign of energy efficiency in the 1980s. In a similar way, visible solar panels signalling sustainability are becoming an increasingly desirable design feature that has clear aesthetic consequences. From a cognitive perspective, the aesthetic features of such designs provide a unique understanding of the notion of sustainability. In the case of the Finlandia Hall, the choice of material in the first renovation was determined by other reasons than care towards future generations. The second renovation showed already more nuanced intergenerational deliberation, which was driven by sustainability principles.

The Finlandia Hall case shows one way in which intergenerational change in aesthetic values can take place. Although the building is less than fifty years old, it is already facing its second large renovation. The main original design features are to be preserved, but the main facade material will be changed into a more durable stone. The change in its appearance will be slight yet significant, as sustainability has been one central driver for the re-evaluation of aesthetic values. These values were previously considered to be immutable, but now the conflict between design and sustainability has led into an unsustainable disillusionment in aesthetic judgment. It will be interesting to see what aesthetic choices will be made fifty years from now, when the third renovation is estimated to take place.

5. *Conclusions*

The relationship between temporality and aesthetics is not a straightforward one. Intergenerational aesthetics proposes to engage with temporality

leaving space for future appreciation and judgments and to intergenerationally think about change in aesthetic values, as our current ones may differ from the ones of upcoming generations. Thinking towards the future in the present, and not just in relation to the past, entails a shift in the theoretical as well as practical stakes of aesthetics.

Theoretically, intergenerational aesthetics brings about a shift in the discussion, from intentionality and creator-centered arguments to emphasize reception, experience, and interpretation by future generations. It also offers a normative component as current aesthetic choices can be assessed considering intergenerational criteria, such as not foreclosing nor limiting the range of aesthetic judgment and experience of future generations and aiming at non-deception. This requires acknowledging and maintaining access to present and past aesthetic values and tastes but not imposing one generation's aesthetic world-view to the posterity, which becomes even more important if we consider that aesthetic experience is mainly a cognitive endeavor. Intergenerational thinking in aesthetics offers a way to explore change in aesthetic values and introduces new dimensions to aesthetics, such as care and sustainability.

In practice, intergenerational aesthetics aims at influencing actual practices and pushes for the inclusion of intergenerational thinking when making aesthetic choices in design and preservationist interventions. The discussion of cases, thus, goes beyond the mere illustration of theoretical points and shows how intergenerational concerns can contribute to solving the pressing issues of sustainability deficiency and environmental problems. Conversely, aesthetic practices contribute also to the formulation and theoretical discussion of questions in academic aesthetics.

Intergenerational aesthetics is thus a highly intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary field whose research aims at overcoming the traditional separations between art and nature, lived and non-lived environments, temporal and atemporal, theory and practice. Intergenerational concerns are actual and pressing; examining aesthetics from an intergenerational perspective aims at contributing to current debates in aesthetics as well as in discussions on sustainability, preservation, the environment, and urban development. It also aims at influencing actual practice or at least the debate on the making of such practical decisions. As a relatively new field, there are many avenues for further research. The first explicit proposals were presented at the "Intergenerational Environmental Aesthetics Panel" at the 78th Annual Meeting of American Society for Aesthetics (Capdevila-Werning and Lehtinen, 2020). Others may include, but are not limited to, discussions on the universality and relativity of aesthetic values, aesthetic choices given our contemporary situation in terms of environment and sustainability, specific case analyses of intergenerational

interest, further interdisciplinary work, promoting the connections between academic aesthetics and the practical dimensions of intergenerational work, research on non-human centered aesthetics and cross-species considerations. As a field intrinsically oriented to the future, intergenerational aesthetics is open to reflections that have yet to emerge.⁷

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⁷ We would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions, as well as Elisa Calderola, co-editor of this issue, for her guidance, understanding, and encouragement throughout the publication process.

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