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Source: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Summer, 1995), pp. 259-268

Published by: Wiley on behalf of American Society for Aesthetics
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/431351
Accessed: 23-10-2015 04:44 UTC

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Everyday Surface Aesthetic Qualities: "Neat," "Messy," "Clean," "Dirty"

In the literature of aesthetics there are numerous lists of aesthetic qualities.[1] These lists almost invariably leave off an entire set of items which will be the topic of this paper. The items in their adjectival form are "neat," "messy," "clean/unclean," "dirty," "sloppy," "filthy," "ordered/disordered" (although something can be ordered in complex ways, I am referring to a certain low-level order, as in "I want these chairs lined up in an ordered fashion"), "cluttered/uncluttered," "cleared/not cleared," "blemished/unblemished," "attractive/unattractive" (again, something can be attractive or "look good" because it has other, grander aesthetic qualities: that is, it is beautiful, sublime, or elegant, but, as with "order," there is a kind of base line or low-level attractiveness that I wish to refer to here), "pure/impure." Noteworthy about these qualities is that they are found frequently in everyday life. Moreover, they are concerned not with the underlying structure or substance of things but with what might be called surface properties. By "surface" I mean what does not heavily influence underlying form or substance: this can either be actual physical surface or some other aspect of the object which may be distinguished from underlying form or substance.[2] I will call the listed group "everyday surface aesthetic qualities."

My thesis is quite radical. I am not simply arguing for the recognition of one or two neglected qualities. What we have here is *an entire class* of neglected properties, one that may be equal in importance to the class of expressive properties, of which there has been so much discussion in the recent history of aesthetics. Yet, with the possible exceptions of Allen Carlson's discussion of roadside clutter and David Novitz's recent account of grooming, there is virtually no discussion of this class of properties in the aesthetics literature.[3]

A number of questions will need to be addressed. Are these really aesthetic qualities? How do these qualities stand up against definitions of aesthetic quality that have been offered in the past? Do they really form a group, and what is it that holds the group together? In particular, do everyday surface aesthetic quality terms refer to a different kind of quality in non-art contexts than they do in art contexts? What role do these terms play in artistic experience and evaluation? Finally, what is the difference between literal and metaphorical application of these terms, and how are they applied at different ontological levels? I will address the latter questions in this group first.

I. APPLICATION TO ART AND EVERYDAY LIFE CONTEXTS

Most discussions of aesthetic qualities begin with a discussion of art. Although many aestheticians insist that aesthetic qualities are not limited to the arts, even *those* thinkers generally take the arts as the primary focus of their discussion. This explains somewhat the neglect of everyday surface aesthetic qualities, since these are not primarily the qualities by which we praise works of art. However, some everyday surface aesthetic qualities, such as "neat," "clean," and "cluttered," do have application in the arts. In the visual arts, for example, we speak of clean lines, clean edges, muddy color, neat construction, and cluttered space. Of course, the lines in a visual work are not literally clean: literal cleanliness has to do with the features of the work qua physical object. A painting is literally clean if it is free of dirt, dust, food parti-

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cles, and such. Having clean lines, it seems, is metaphorical. Thus something can be literally clean and fail to have clean lines, or have clean lines and fail to be literally clean.[4]

Yet are we sure where the literal ends and the metaphorical begins? "Clean" could be taken to simply mean "clear or free of that which is unwanted," i.e., of impurities, adulterations, imperfections, blemishes, and other unwanted things. Cleaning off the table is often simply a matter of clearing it of materials irrelevant to the next project. "Clean" does not have to refer simply to absence of dirt. Absence of dirt is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a room being clean, since a room may have a dirt floor. We even speak of clean dirt! It is true that cleaning a painting means getting dirt and other unwanted substances off of the surface. But this is not the only application of the term "cleaning" to painting. One can also speak of cleaning up the lines during the process of composition. It is just not clear that one meaning is literal and the other metaphorical. Moreover, *both* meanings of "clean," in this instance, are "aesthetic" in the sense that both have to do with perceptual properties that give or do not give pleasure.

This leads me to suggest that there are different *domains* in which everyday surface aesthetic quality terms may be applied. Cleaning off dirt from a painting is a matter of physical surface aesthetic qualities; cleaning up lines or colors within a painting is a matter of art surface aesthetic qualities. But what about cleaning up the *composition* of a painting or a musical work? Composition seems to be well below the surface features of a work of art. Or is it? Ontological layerings might be like the layerings of an onion: each layer, even the inner ones, can have its own surface. The features of the composition which are cleaned might still be considered surface features in that they are surface features of the composition. There is something that underlies those features, a more basic form of the composition, which is cleaned up. To say that something can be neatened or cleaned *implies* that there is something underlying that is worthy of neatening/cleaning.

Someone might want to claim that the literal meaning of "clean" has nothing to do with perceptual properties—that something can be clean or not regardless of how it looks or smells. It would follow that since aesthetic qualities are perceptual then any aesthetic applications of the term "clean" would be secondary. Sure, there are cases in which something is unclean in a non-perceptual way, for instance, gold that has impurities or water that has bacteria. But we learn the concept of cleanness as children by how things look and smell. This gives the perceptual meaning of "clean" a certain developmental primacy. It also seems to privilege "neat" and "clean" over "messy" and "dirty."

Yet, interestingly, despite our early training, "messiness" is not necessarily a negative trait. That abstract expressionists' brush strokes are (or at least initially *look*) messy, and minimalist brush strokes are (or at least initially *look*) neat, does not mean that abstract expressionism is worse than minimalism. Perhaps this is because the surface messiness of abstract expressionist paintings only hides an underlying order. Thus we might speak of de Kooning as having clean edges or crisp lines even though his paintings initially look messy. Part of the attraction of abstract expressionist painting may be due to this tension between surface messiness and underlying neatness.

Architecture provides another kind of case. Modernist architects claimed that their work, with its clean lines and uncluttered surfaces, was superior to the work of the eclectic schools that dominated nineteenth-century architecture. Whatever the case it is certain that everyday surface aesthetic qualities are not only relevant to aesthetics in general but also to the various arts.

In a letter, Stan Godlovitch has given me the following examples from music:

> Cleanliness has musical applications particularly in jazz and a propos playing style, Joe Pass is considered a "dirty" player because many of his passages are "dirty." This means that he is pretty sloppy with tonal clarity and abides buzzes and other distracting noises which come from a less than "clean" execution. "Clean" players give you all the notes crystal clear, well articulated, under control. Why is Joe Pass's playing accepted? Well, although, technically, dirty playing is sloppy playing and needs cleaning up, aesthetically dirty playing can have an appeal all of its own much like certain otherwise crappy voices [like Jimmy Durante or Louis Armstrong] which win appeal for their timbral uniqueness. No one plays

dirty the way Joe Pass does, and, he is otherwise so interesting, one would actually feel something was wrong if he were to clean up his act! This makes for various pseudo-paradoxes. It carries through, I may add, to flamenco playing where the authentic original performers do not have the smooth clean execution of classical players who turn to flamenco [e.g., Pepe Romero]. For the true aficionados, the "dirty" sound of the authentic players is preferable because it lends the music a raw coarse unrefined energy which some people think reveals the true soul or spirit of flamenco. Perhaps that is true of jazz too; i.e., that clean execution represents a value of an anti-folk pro-aristocratic and pro-technocratic conception of performance which, by its very studied quality, robs the execution of genuine spontaneity. [This is to say that to imitate dirty playing is as bad as trying to clean it up.] And then there is Jimi Hendrix who introduced the aesthetics of dirt into rock. There are all sorts of devices called Fuzz Boxes which will dirty up otherwise clean guitar sounds—for those who just cannot dirty it up on their own.[5]

Terms associated strongly with performances of works of art may be added to our list of everyday surface aesthetic quality terms. "Sloppy," "careless/careful," "shoddy," "slipshod," "precise/imprecise," "meticulous" are all related to "neat" and "messy" and may all be applied to performances. They may also be used to describe works of art and objects of craft in general (a bricklayer's work may be shoddy, slipshod, imprecise). They may refer to perceptual properties of a performance or work, or to the activity of the performer, artist, or craftsperson.

Yet where we find everyday surface aesthetic qualities most often discussed is in practical life: in the home, the yard, the workplace, the shops, personal attire, and personal grooming. Rooms become messy, cluttered. They must be cleaned, cleared, set straight, tidied up. Kitchens and bathrooms can be unclean or "filthy." Floors must be washed when dirty and unattractive. Shelves may be ordered or disordered. Desks can be cluttered. Schedules and organizational plans can be messy. Products can be presented neatly and attractively or not. Clothes run from messy and dirty to neat and clean. People too can be messy or neat, clean or unclean. They are considered messy and unclean if their clothes, grooming, possessions, products, or work stations have these qualities.[6]

A possible explanation of why everyday surface aesthetic qualities may have been neglected by aestheticians may relate to gender socialization and stereotyping. The home and yard are traditionally the domains of the housewife and servant. There are househusbands and male servants, but most commonly this role goes to a woman. The office in its aesthetic dimension is traditionally the world of the secretary, again most commonly a woman. The teaching of personal grooming is traditionally the domain of the mother. The housewife, servant, secretary, and mother are the ones who are generally concerned with the messy, the cluttered, the clean, and the neat. I am not suggesting that this is as it should be. Feminists have well argued that these activities should be shared equally between the sexes. Nor am I suggesting that men never engage in cleaning, neatening, dusting, and so on. However, men who do have jobs which are primarily concerned with these activities, for example, garbagemen, often have low social status. (A possible exception is someone whose job is to clean up a corporate structure, but that is not an example of concern for surface perceptual features.) This leads to the possibility that aesthetics has ignored everyday surface aesthetic qualities because of their association with what has been called "women's work." If so, then a recognition of the importance of these qualities should form a part of feminist aesthetics. Perhaps it is a form of sexism to think of these qualities as outside the noble domain of aesthetics.

Women in our culture in the 1950s and the 1960s were taught to be obsessed with neatness and cleanness. Men of the same generation were encouraged to ignore these things or delegate them to others while concentrating on matters that could gain them success in the business or professional worlds. Today it is possible for some of those same women to gain some aesthetic delight in observing clutter in their homes. I am not speaking here of the situation in which a woman thinks "Isn't it great that I no longer feel compelled to clean up," which would be merely consistent with *tolerating* clutter, but of the situation in which a woman, or a man for that matter, notices the clutter and perceptually enjoys it.[7] As I have suggested above, messiness and clutter are not necessarily negative aesthetic

qualities, although they are usually cast in this role.

Another plausible explanation for the neglect of everyday surface aesthetic qualities is simply that aesthetics has been mainly associated with transcendent experience afforded by great works of art. Everyday surface aesthetic qualities have been neglected for the same reason as aesthetic qualities associated with body decoration, kitsch, and the design of everyday objects.

II. ARE THEY AESTHETIC QUALITIES?

But are the items I have listed really aesthetic qualities? As I noted in the beginning, they are virtually never mentioned in the main works on aesthetic qualities. Göran Hermerén's recent book *The Nature of Aesthetic Qualities* distinguishes among five kinds (I will give two examples of each): emotion qualities ("somber," "gay"); behavior qualities ("bold," "nervous"); gestalt qualities ("unified," "disorganized"); taste qualities ("elegant," "delightful"); and affective qualities ("funny," "glaring"). It might be argued that although Hermerén does not mention them, everyday surface aesthetic qualities can simply be added to the category of gestalt qualities. Here is the rest of his list of gestalt qualities: "coherent," "tightly knit," "complete," "simple," "balanced," "harmonious," "integrated," "chaotic," and "consonant."[8] But note that most of these qualities, i.e., "complete," "balanced," "harmonious," and "integrated" refer to structure. This is why they are called "gestalt" qualities. *The Oxford English Dictionary* describes "gestalt" as "an integrated perceptual structure or unity conceived as functionally more than the sum of its parts." Everyday surface aesthetic qualities border on the structural, and sometimes edge into it, but they are mainly qualities of surface. That distinction is confirmed by the fact that one of the main functions of neatening and cleaning is revelation of underlying form or structure. For example, neatening up or cleaning a facade or a room may reveal an underlying structure with its own aesthetic properties. The architect and interior decorator are responsible for that structure, not the neatener or cleaner. But this does not mean that "neatness" and "cleanness" are inapplicable to what architects and interior decorators do. As I have indicated, the architect and interior decorator are responsible for another domain or ontological layer to which the terms "neat" and "clean" may be applied.[9]

It is arguable that neatening and cleaning *contribute* to a room being more balanced, harmonious, and integrated. Perhaps this happens not simply through revealing these properties but through clarifying them. But, again, that places everyday surface aesthetic qualities on another level than Hermerén's gestalt qualities, although related to them.

Hermerén's gestalt qualities are generally more complex (at least on a perceptual level) than everyday surface aesthetic qualities.[10] They are more complex because they are structural, having to do with the interrelation of parts along more than one dimension. Balance and harmony are special kinds of order that require complex skills to achieve. Think of what is needed to achieve harmony in a musical work. Harmony in music is a matter of combining parts, often from two or more different lines, to form an ordered and pleasing whole. The term "integration" is, in turn, closely related to "harmony": it is generally defined in terms of harmonious composition. Achieving balance, harmony, or integration in a work of art or some other thing is quite different and considerably more difficult than simply creating order by "straightening up" or "putting away." Yet these are the typical actions involved in making something neat. By contrast, the term "chaotic," insofar as it refers to something which is utterly disordered, points us to a situation in which all structure is lacking. Although it is not as clearly a gestalt term as "harmony" and "integrated," it is also not an everyday surface aesthetic quality term since everyday surface aesthetic qualities require an underlying structure to be neatened, messed up, cleaned, or dirtied.[11]

Cleanness is even further from Hermerén's gestalt properties than neatness. Something can be clean without having any of those properties, and something can have all of them and not be clean. Yet, like neatness, cleaning can reveal underlying structure. Cleaning up a building, sculpture, or painting usually does this.

Someone might reply that aesthetics has to do *primarily* with art, and that although there are uses for everyday surface aesthetic quality terms in the artworld, they do not pertain primarily to art and are therefore not aesthetic

terms. It is true that these terms do not refer primarily to art. It is also true that qualities found primarily in art have a characteristic which everyday surface aesthetic qualities do not share: perceptual complexity. It is because of this complexity that we have professional critics in art and not in room neatness. (Although amateur critics of room neatness abound!)

One well-known writer on aesthetic qualities, Frank Sibley, insists that aesthetic terms or concepts are not limited to artistic discourse but may be used in "everyday life." So everyday surface aesthetic quality terms *could* be aesthetic terms, at least on his account. However, like Hermerén, Sibley fails to mention any of the terms I have listed, even though he does include such unusual items as "flaccid," "weakly," and "washed out" in his list of aesthetic terms. Perhaps this is because everyday surface aesthetic quality terms are not found *primarily* in artistic discourse. Why not just say that some aesthetic qualities are found primarily in art, and others primarily in everyday life?

A definition of "aesthetic quality" would be useful at this point. Although Sibley does not give such a definition, he does give some characteristics of what he calls "aesthetic concepts": aesthetic concepts are (1) often based on, or linked to, appeal to non-aesthetic concepts, (2) perceptual: a matter of "noticing" and "seeing," (3) determined by taste perceptiveness or sensitivity (by "taste" Sibley simply means the ability to discern the aesthetic qualities in things), and (4) not condition- or rule-governed: they cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions—nor do they have sufficient conditions alone. Sibley also insists that we cannot derive the presence of these qualities from the presence of specific non-aesthetic qualities.

Let us apply these points to "neatness." Neatness is certainly related to non-aesthetic properties, for instance, the actual physical properties of the neatened room. We sometimes say "The room is messy because there are socks on the floor," or "In order to be neat the clothes need to be lined up straight." Neatness is also perceptual. We *see* that the room is neat. But it is not perceptual in the straightforward way that "red" is perceptual. Neatness is perceptual in the way that "elegant" is perceptual: it is a matter of "taste" in Sibley's sense of that term. Some people are able to notice neatness in ways that others cannot. Those people often *appreciate* neatness in ways that others cannot. True, people often disagree strongly about whether or not a room is neat. But this need not lead to total relativism. We generally distinguish between mere personal preference (whether you *like* to live in a neat house) and matters of fact (whether the house *really* is neat). We will often, to use Kant's term, *demand* that others see the room as we see it: neat or messy.[12]

Just as with elegance, some people are good judges of neatness.[13] These people can point out features that allow us to see the neatness or messiness that we did not see before. Others seem to be neatness-blind. In any cooperative household there is a housemate who is messier than others. That person may nonetheless insist that he or she *is* neat. The others may say that this person lacks a certain perceptiveness, that he or she is insensitive to mess or clutter. Someone could also lack sensitivity to dirt, filth, and grime. Such a person would be cleanness-blind. Moreover, neatness and cleanness, or cleanliness (the disposition to clean up), are often used as gauges of taste. Persons who care about neatness and cleanness often see persons who do not as tasteless. Ironically, people who care about maintaining a certain level of clutter in their homes, offices, desks, and attire often see neatness or cleanliness in others as a sign of lack of taste.

Sibley also notes that there are degrees of taste, from rudimentary to refined, and that most people learn easily how to make rudimentary aesthetic attributions.[14] Two examples he gives of such attributions are "warm" colors and "gay" pictures. "Neat" and "clean," although not clearly metaphorical like "warm" and "gay," may be rudimentary in his sense. Sibley distinguishes between rudimentary attributions and ones that "more obviously deserve to be called aesthetic." But why are the more rudimentary attributions less deserving of the name "aesthetic"? Sibley does not say.

Finally, there are no absolute rules by which we can resolve disputes over the application of everyday surface aesthetic quality terms. There are no necessary and sufficient conditions for determining that something is neat, nor any set of relevant features some subset of which is sufficient for application of the concept. One thing is neat for one set of reasons, another for

another set. Of course, we can give specific stipulative definitions of neatness for specific contexts. A parent may say: "By neat I mean that everything is off of the floors." But this is not the same as a definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions.

It might be argued that neatness, messiness, cleanness, and dirtiness are non-aesthetic qualities since their main domain is the merely practical, and the aesthetic is non-practical. True, our concern for neatness, cleanness, and the unblemished is often not aesthetically motivated. Neatness in our desks, files, computer files, and rooms often helps us to accomplish our goals more effectively. Cleanliness prevents disease. Grocery customers are more likely to buy unblemished fruits. But, as we have seen, not all cases of application of the term "neatness" or "cleanness" are oriented to practical goals. Moreover, practical goals are often entwined with aesthetic matters. For example, unblemished fruits sell more readily *because* they are more aesthetically pleasing. (But note also that what the general populace may find to be a blemish in a piece of fruit may be considered an attraction to others. Thus "blemished" apples might sell better in communities that are sensitive to possible ecological damage caused by processes used to insure the clean appearance of an apple. The apples may even come to *look* better to these people. Thus, moral as well as practical issues enter into our aesthetic discriminations at this level.)

Consider this further argument for the status of these qualities as aesthetic qualities. We often think of positive aesthetic qualities as perceptual qualities which please us in the apprehension of them and of negative aesthetic qualities as ones which do the opposite. When someone who values neatness looks at a neat room, particularly after it has been "neatened" or "cleaned up," he or she will experience a certain pleasure in apprehending that neatness. So it would seem that, on this definition, the qualities of "neat," "messy," etc., are aesthetic qualities.

It might be said that in the case of cleanness what is appreciated is not the cleanness itself but the aesthetic qualities of the object cleaned. It is true that when a Monet painting is cleaned we are better able to appreciate the underlying structure and the brilliance of the colors. However, it is often the case that when something is cleaned, we simply appreciate the cleanness of it, particularly if *we* have just cleaned it. There can be considerable pleasure in contemplating something cleaned with great effort. What is appreciated is not simply the object cleaned but that plus a combination of process and product: the cleaning up and the cleaned nature of the object cleaned.

III. CLEANING ONE'S ROOM AS AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Monroe Beardsley describes five symptoms of aesthetic experience.[15] These include object directedness, felt freedom, detached affect, active discovery, and a sense of wholeness. He thinks that the first is a necessary condition, and that three of the others must be present if we are to have aesthetic experience. Presumably, aesthetic qualities are qualities which produce at least some of these symptoms.

Let us look at cleaning one's room and contemplating the cleaned nature of the room (or the room-as-cleaned) in terms of these symptoms. (I will assume that the two acts are aspects of one overall experience.) *Object directedness:* The object of the aesthetic experience is the room-as-cleaned. *Felt freedom:* Whereas cleaning one's room is usually thought of as a chore, there is often a felt sense of freedom when we contemplate the cleaned room. Beardsley describes the aesthetic way of seeing as one in which "there is a relaxation, an absence of strain, but also a kind of visual fulfillment."[16] Contemplating a neatened and cleaned room has this effect. *Detached affect:* There need not be a strong affect connected with cleaning one's room or with contemplating something that is neat, clean, ordered, or unblemished. Someone who contemplates the neatness of a room might well do this in a disinterested way so that the room is "set at a distance." *Active discovery:* "A sense of actively exercising constructive powers of the mind, of being challenged by a variety of potentially conflicting stimuli to try to make them cohere ... a sense of achieving intelligibility."[17] Although we sometimes discover things in the process of cleaning our rooms ("There is the library book I failed to turn in!"), this is probably not what Beardsley intended. Nonetheless, the process of cleaning one's room may include a low-level sense of active discov-

ery insofar as one is challenged by choices concerning what is to go where. Certainly the room becomes more intelligible as a result of the process. *Sense of wholeness:* "A sense of integration as a person." Many people report an increased level of integration after they have cleaned their rooms, desks, or files. There is a sense of being ready for the next task. The level of sense of personal integration may not be very great, but it might be greater than what we get from seeing some good paintings, movies, or dances.

Objections may be raised against some of these points (for instance, the one about active discovery): however Beardsley requires only that three out of the four symptoms be present, including the first one, for us to have an aesthetic experience. So, cleaning one's room and contemplating it as cleaned seems to be an aesthetic experience on Beardsley's definition, although probably not a profound one. And aesthetic experiences are experiences of aesthetic qualities.

In another of his articles Beardsley argues that aesthetic qualities must be regional qualities which may serve as a basis for aesthetic evaluation.[18] A regional quality is defined as a quality that a complex object has as a result of the relation between its parts. Above, I argued that although everyday surface aesthetic qualities may be used for aesthetic evaluation, they are unlike gestalt qualities in that they are not perceptually complex. But Beardsley has not argued that the regional quality *itself* must be complex. Many everyday surface aesthetic qualities are qualities of objects which themselves are complex. Still, it is arguable that everyday surface aesthetic qualities are not qualities that a complex object has as a result of a complex relation between parts—and that is perhaps what Beardsley meant. If so, then the qualities I have described would not be aesthetic qualities on this Beardsleyan account of aesthetic qualities. Neatness is a matter of relatively simple relations between parts. If my pants are hung so that there are no inappropriate creases, and the lines of the legs are parallel, then my pants are hung neatly. Cleanness may also be a quality of a complex object, but it is generally not seen as a matter of relation between the object's parts, even though cleaning sometimes *clarifies* relations between parts.

But perhaps everyday surface aesthetic quality terms refer to complex properties when they are applied to works of art even though they do not refer to complex properties in non-art contexts. Up to now I have assumed that everyday surface aesthetic quality terms refer to the same kinds of qualities when they are used in art contexts as when they are used in non-art everyday contexts. It might be countered, however, that in the context of artworld discourse when someone says that a line is "clean" this claim comes with a number of connotative reverberations, suggesting perhaps that the work in which the line occurs, or at least a significant part of that work, is harmonious and integrated. I accept this modification of my thesis, with the understanding that everyday surface aesthetic quality terms still refer primarily to non-complex properties. It follows then that if these terms *can* refer to complex perceptual qualities in art contexts then they *would,* in these instances, refer to complex regional qualities, which would also be, on Beardsley's view, aesthetic qualities.

IV. CAN EVERYDAY SURFACE AESTHETIC QUALITIES EXEMPLIFY?

Nelson Goodman proposes four symptoms of the aesthetic: syntactic density, semantic density, syntactic repleteness, and exemplification.[19] Non-art everyday surface aesthetic qualities do not show any of the first three symptoms. However, I will argue that they may show the fourth. Goodman's symptoms of the aesthetic are actually symptoms of the artistic aesthetic: they are characteristics of symbol systems, and Goodman's special interest is the symbol systems used in artistic production. Everyday surface aesthetic qualities are not constituted by symbol systems, so it is not surprising that they fail to have the first three symptoms. Goodman insists that the first three features call for "maximum sensitivity of discrimination." Although neatness calls for some sensitivity of discrimination, it does not call for a maximum.

There is, however, a possible argument that everyday surface aesthetic qualities can exemplify in Goodman's sense. Exemplification, for Goodman, is possession plus reference (p. 53). In certain circumstances, a clean room can refer to its own cleanness. A room can serve as an exemplar of cleanness (for example, the neat

brother's room expresses cleanness in the context of a parent's inspection). In such an instance the cleanness of the room comes to the fore, whereas other features are backgrounded. If a clean room does not refer to cleanness then we cannot really aesthetically appreciate its cleanness. But I do think we sometimes aesthetically appreciate the cleanness of a room. Thus, contra Goodman, a symbol system is not necessary for exemplification. All we need is specification given by context of what is to exemplify what. Any feature of an object or field of objects can be taken as exemplifying itself by the viewer. This is somewhat like what has been traditionally called "taking the aesthetic attitude." A viewer can take the cleanness of a room as exemplifying cleanness.

Here is an example that supports my point. A messy roommate is wise to clean up one area of the house quite well rather than cleaning all areas moderately, since the clean roommate will appreciate the cleanness of the one clean area but will ignore the moderate cleanness overall. The reason for this is that the clean roommate values cleanness and takes the one clean area as a symbol of this. Thus for the clean roommate this area exemplifies cleanness. Since Goodman only insists that one of the symptoms of the aesthetic be present, then it is arguable that even on his primarily art-centered interpretation of the aesthetic it is true that everyday surface aesthetic qualities are genuinely aesthetic.

V. THE VALUE OF EVERYDAY SURFACE AESTHETIC QUALITIES

We often assume that "neat," "clean," "uncluttered," and "unblemished" are always positive; and that "messy," "dirty," "cluttered," and "blemished" are always negative aesthetic qualities. However, people hold differing views concerning the value of everyday surface aesthetic qualities. Some people value neatness highly. Others, not necessarily the same people, value cleanness highly. Others again do not value either of these very much. These people may actually value messiness and clutter. I know artists who revel in the messiness of the creative process, who literally enjoy the messiness of paint. Few adults value dirtiness, although sometimes "dirty" is valued metaphorically, as when the music gets "down and dirty." Children, however, seem sometimes to value dirtiness aesthetically: sometimes it *looks* good to them.

"Clutter," in particular, is a term that allows itself to be taken in a positive sense. Many people like to temper neatness with some clutter.[20] They take pleasure in their clutter. Some people take pleasure in considerably more clutter than others. Front yards in the California Sierra foothill country are generally much more cluttered than front yards in the suburbs. People there prefer this lifestyle and may have even moved to that part of the state in part so that they can be free to have a yard full of clutter. They would not want to live in the town where a family was recently sued for allowing their front yard to return to its natural state.

Debates between advocates of neatness and advocates of clutter often take the form: natural vs. artificial. Advocates of clutter and messiness often claim that these properties are more natural and hence more valuable. The hippies of the 1960s argued that messiness and even dirtiness were more natural than neatness and cleanness. However, advocates of neatness and cleanness may also refer to these qualities as more natural. They might refer to the way cats lick themselves and chimps engage in grooming. It all depends on how one sees nature.

VI. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

What role should everyday surface aesthetic qualities play in a general aesthetics? Some assistance can be found in looking at the development of an aesthetic sense in children. Many of our first aesthetic experiences are associated with everyday surface aesthetic qualities. Children are taught to be neat, clean, orderly, and not to be messy, sloppy, and unkempt.[21] And perhaps as a form of rebellion, children often choose to value the opposite qualities. These concepts are learned long before such traditionally recognized aesthetic concepts as "grace" and "delicacy." Does that make them distant from such concepts? Not necessarily. Sibley gives an account of how children learn complex musical terms which can help us here. He argues that parents and teachers begin to teach aesthetic concepts by suggesting that simple pieces of music are "hurrying" or "running." From there they move to concepts like "lively"

and "gay." Finally, they teach more complex concepts like "solemn" and "dynamic."[22] He implies that learning the simpler concepts provides the basis for learning the more complex ones. Perhaps "neat," "clean," and "orderly" are simpler concepts which provide a basis for developing more complex notions such as "harmonious," "organized," and "beautiful." Note that young musicians are encouraged to learn how to be neat, clean, and ordered first before more complex abilities are developed. Later, a little messiness or disorder might be allowed in order to better show off underlying structure.

Some readers of this paper may balk at the idea of calling the qualities I am discussing aesthetic qualities. They might insist that aesthetic qualities should have complex features which make them accessible only after much training. They might even argue that something distinctively new emerges at the level of such concepts as "elegant," "beautiful," and "sublime," which just is not there in such concepts as "neat" and "clean." Those same readers, however, may be willing to grant the status of aesthetic quality to everyday surface aesthetic quality terms when these terms are applied by critics and other knowledgeable persons to works of art, since at that level, through connoting such gestalt qualities as "harmonious" and "integrated," these terms may take on a degree of complexity which they lack at the everyday level. I accept both of these points and suggest that it might be more appropriate to call everyday surface aesthetic qualities proto-aesthetic qualities when found at the level of everyday life (given that they are taught in childhood and provide some of the basis for more complex aesthetic concepts), whereas at the level of art they may have sufficient complexity to be called aesthetic qualities in the fullest sense of the term.

I have by no means exhausted this subject matter. It is striking, for instance, that such terms as "dirty" and "filthy" are strongly associated with the obscene, the lewd, and the pornographic. "Polluted" and "fouled" are terms which we use for the extreme of impurity. Some forms of neurosis, such as obsessive hand-cleaning, involve everyday surface aesthetic qualities. A full analysis of the aesthetics of everyday surface aesthetic qualities would need to explore these dimensions. I only wish to stress that the similarities between what I have called everyday surface aesthetic qualities and the qualities that have traditionally been called aesthetic are remarkable and should not be neglected in the future.[23]

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1. Consider the lists in the following well-known articles and books. Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959): 421–450, (reprinted in William Kennick, *Art and Philosophy* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979], pp. 542–564); Monroe Beardsley, "What is an Aesthetic Quality?," *The Aesthetic Point of View* (Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 93–110; Peter Kivy, *Speaking of Art* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973); Ted Cohen, "Aesthetic/Non-aesthetic and the Concept of Taste: A Critique of Sibley's Position," *Theoria* 39 (1973): 113–152, (reprinted in Kennick); Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 30–31; Göran Hermerén, *The Nature of Aesthetic Qualities* (Lund University Press, 1988).

2. There is a problem with calling "dirty" a surface quality. Something can be dirty not just on the surface but through and through. However, this exception seems to prove the rule, since we still tend to think of dirt as accidental to that which it covers or soils. So even if dirt is not literally on the surface alone it is still on the surface ontologically speaking. This leads us to a second difficulty. "Purity" and "impurity" do seem to refer to the entire substance and not just the surface. So perhaps *these* are not surface qualities. But they are clearly related to the qualities I have mentioned and in particular to clean and unclean.

3. Allen Carlson, "Environmental Aesthetics and the Dilemma of Aesthetic Education," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 10 (1976): 69–82. David Novitz, *The Boundaries of Art* (Temple University Press, 1992), chap. 6: "Keeping up Appearances." However Novitz is mainly interested in the social implications of personal appearance and the dependence of aesthetic perceptions on socially held values, which is not my concern here.

Purity and impurity have, of course, been discussed in relation to Aristotle's theory of catharsis.

4. Current debate over the restoration of such works as the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel would be relevant to an extended discussion of this issue. The main problem here is that some art historians believe that the cleaning of the paintings also involves an intervention into aesthetic qualities of the painting itself. Much of the modeling of Michelangelo's figures seems to have been lost in the cleaning process.

5. Stan Godlovitch: e-mail letter of November 20, 1993.

6. Interestingly, these are often the properties non-aestheticians are thinking of when they refer to the "aesthetics" of something.

7. I owe this example to MaryAnn Shulkait. Arthur Danto, in "Symbolic Expressions of the Self," in *Beyond the Brillo*

Box (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992), pp. 56–57, speaks of how a disordered room might be an expression of a feminist point rather than simply a manifestation of cultural background or a psychological condition. His point that order and disorder can carry some semiotic charge is an exception to the rule that aestheticians do not discuss everyday surface aesthetic qualities.

8. Hermerén, p. 106.

9. However, although putting a chair in one place rather than another might seem to be "straightening up" to one person, it might seem to be "redecoration" to someone else.

10. Of course, everyday surface aesthetic qualities may well be complex on other levels or in other respects. For instance, attributions of "neatness" in a particular subgroup of a particular culture may depend on complex social traditions. It is also arguable that these qualities are ontologically complex and therefore that an adequate philosophical analysis of them must be complex.

11. Cheryl Foster, in comments on a version of this paper given to the Pacific Division Meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics, April 1994, intriguingly argues (along Sartrean lines) that "chaotic" can be an everyday surface aesthetic quality if one applies it to a perceptually absent structure when we perceive that absence.

12. The issue of realism vs. antirealism of aesthetic qualities is raised here. My own view is that aesthetic qualities are socially constituted and do not exist outside a specific social context. Nonetheless they are real within that frame. But this is too large an issue to discuss here.

13. There is an interesting connection between neatness and elegance in English. In slang "neat" is often used to refer to something like "elegant" or "stylish." This points to the possibility that neatness is a more primitive cousin to elegance.

14. Sibley, p. 560.

15. Monroe Beardsley, "In Defense of Aesthetic Value," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 52 (1979): 723–749.

16. Beardsley, "What is an Aesthetic Quality?," p. 100.

17. Beardsley, "In Defense of Aesthetic Value," p. 741.

18. Beardsley, "What is an Aesthetic Quality?"

19. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 252–255.

20. Of course, it might be the case that two people equally dislike clutter, and yet what A considers to be clutter B considers not to be clutter. Under these circumstances A might come to believe that B values clutter even though B would deny it.

21. Sibley, p. 559.

22. Sibley, p. 560.

23. I would like to thank the members of the Philosophy Department at San Jose State University, the referees of this journal, and Cheryl Foster for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. I also would like to thank Stan Godlovitch for allowing me to quote his letter.