

# Aesthetic Histories



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# Evental Aesthetics

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Aesthetic Histories

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# Introduction

Mandy–Suzanne Wong

**H**istory is a contingent, viscous, noisome, scintillating, vibrating mesh of serendipitous convergences. This issue of *Evental Aesthetics* represents one such unforeseen yet fortunate confluence. Because this journal publishes online, an unexpected surfeit of rigorous and well-crafted submissions does not entail the difficult decision, which is faced by many print journals, of having to reject some of those deserving articles despite their impeccable quality, simply on account of limited page space. On the contrary, because EA is online, open-access, and independent, we can do more than we expect. We editors can adjust our expectations, we can have them changed for us by authors, taking advantage of contingency, opportunity, and inspiration. That is how this issue happened.

Upon our most recent call for papers, we received close to a dozen essays that deserve to be presented to our readership. Our decision was to publish all of them. Instead of the single issue that we had planned for this winter, there will therefore be two wintertime issues of EA. The first is what you see before you, entitled *Aesthetic Histories*. The second, with

a themed section on poverty and asceticism, will appear in January of 2014.

*Aesthetic Histories* consists of several essays that, whilst they were submitted in response to our regular “open” call, share a common interest. That we received them all at approximately the same time is sheer coincidence. Ironically, the last time EA’s authors serendipitously converged around a common intellectual point, the result was an issue on missed opportunity (Vol. 1 No. 2, *The Missed*). This time, our contributors’ shared concern is the inspiring and confounding, healthy and uncomfortable and above all inevitable relationship between history and aesthetic praxis.

Philosophers and scholars of the humanities are careful with history. Historical thinking rarely happens *sans* critique nowadays; and in the wake of Foucauldian archaeology, Agamben’s work on paradigms and signatures, Object-Oriented Ontology, Morton’s thinking on hyperobjects, and far from least of all Arthur Danto’s philosophy “after the end of art,” that is only as it should be. Thinking, and aesthetic thinking in particular, continually interrogates the relationship between current practices and bygone things.

Our contributor Jason Hoelscher offers a model of art history based on biological formations such as swarms. In what might be called an aesthetic historiography, he emphasizes the role of tendency in the development of visual art forms. Using object-oriented ontology, Prudence Gibson navigates the precarious shoals between narration in general and aesthetic experience, between events and tales and ubiquitous, overwhelming aesthetic objects, as she visits a rundown old house that is also a museum, an artwork, and a story full of holes.

Theodore Gracyk is suspicious of the supposedly dependent relationship, championed by the late Arthur Danto, between art-historical knowledge and what Danto calls the transfiguration of the commonplace: the re-envisioning of non-art objects as art. Via several telling examples from popular music, Gracyk refutes Danto’s thesis that artworks are distinguishable *qua* artworks by their recognizable roles in art history. Gracyk further suggests that the concept of “fine art,” an umbrella under which may gather all art forms, is equally unhelpful in determining whether or not a given object constitutes art.

Sarah Snyder examines several reasons why an art form goes out of style. Investigating the demise of Classical-style tragedy, which if it were written today would receive little positive attention, she finds that this art form relies on an assumption of the autonomy of human reason. Although the same assumption led Immanuel Kant to a theory of aesthetic autonomy, Snyder argues that it is no longer viable today. The purview of tragedy is in fact metaphysics, she suggests: another intellectual realm that has fallen out of style.

Finally, Joanna Demers examines new music that attempts to precisely replicate older songs and performances. Her essay consists of thoughts and questions inspired by her reading of Simon Reynolds' recent book, *Retromania*. With this evocative editorial, Demers inaugurates a new component of *Evental Aesthetics* that is provisionally entitled "Reading." Her encounter with Reynolds' book takes the form not of a review but of a launching point for discussion in which reading, as a mutually affective relation with a text, continues long after the last page. In general, the "Reading" section of the journal will consist of question-provoking responses to other academic publications. The particulars of this section will solidify gradually throughout the coming year.