Research Article

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What's in a Bottle? Morandi's Art and Ordinary Aesthetics

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Abstract: This article's assumption is that ordinary aesthetics does not necessarily imply a distancing from art and artists; rather, it can benefit from the input of creators when they use everyday scenes or objects as their theme. This approach focuses on the practice of twentieth-century Italian painter Giorgio Morandi, who depicted compositions of common objects such as bottles, jars, and vases. Through Morandi's meditative and artistic search, these objects are given value and aesthetic elevation in his paintings. Thomas Leddy's aesthetics of everyday life will also be called upon in my analysis, insofar as the author recognizes a continuity between the ordinary and the extraordinary, through auratic experiences. If Morandi discovers the extraordinary in the trivial, this is achieved through a gradual process of selection regarding the objects he favoured, which allows for the interaction of various levels of aesthetic intensity. Morandi's objects and models and their preparation suggest a circulation between aesthetic degrees that, in turn, suggests a timeless "language of things" fixed through the discourse of the paintings. Along these lines, it will be necessary to address the enchantment related to common things, a mesmerizing presence of which we became more aware through Morandi compositions.

Keywords: Morandi, objects, everyday life, aura, ordinary aesthetics, extraordinary

1 Introduction

This article suggests an approach to ordinary aesthetics through a connection to art. My intention is to reveal that art can, in certain contexts, meet the aesthetics of everyday life.

One of the two dominant theoretical positions of ordinary aesthetics restricts attempts to elevate ordinary life to something special and artistic, while the other attempts to bring ordinary life closer to the aesthetics of art. Above all, it is this second meaning that will prove productive for my analysis, not only of Morandi's art, but also because it fosters art and is equally enriching for the aesthetics of everyday life.

Through the work of Italian artist Giorgio Morandi, an artist who depicted everyday objects in his paintings, we acknowledge that the appreciation of ordinary aspects of life can be evoked by the example of his artistic practice. I intend to highlight that Morandi not only focuses on common everyday objects (which would probably not be sufficient to promote an aesthetics of everyday life[1]), but also acknowledges that the tones and atmosphere of his subjects also arise from the artist's austere life, which in turn migrates and has continuity in his paintings.

1 Melchionne, "The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics," 4.

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My focus on the ordinary supposes the possibility of revelations of an extraordinary kind, in line with the theorist Thomas Leddy, who is a major supporter of the expansive line of everyday aesthetics.[2] This expansive approach, which favours an appreciation of certain moments of the ordinary, turning them into something special or extraordinary, assimilates in part John Dewey's notion of aesthetic experience. It is a fact that Dewey has become relevant to the theories of everyday aesthetics, in particular his notion of experience,[3] that is, an attitude that brings life and aesthetics closer together, as long as there is an investment or increase in attention to what surrounds us, that is, an attitude that leads to raising the interest of a situation, which may at first seem banal. Dewey's conception also relies on continuity, structure, and consummation of the experience as described in his seminal work "Art as Experience."[4] Following Dewey, Leddy also distances himself from the opposite theory, the restrictive aspect of everyday aesthetics, revealing that it would be impoverishing to exclude the contributions of artists for the enrichment and awareness of the aesthetics that pervade some moments of everyday life.

I will also examine how additional arguments can support an expansive aesthetics of the quotidian and, in some cases, challenge the resistances we may encounter.

In Morandi, the specific connection between everyday life and art will lead to an understanding of the continuous and dynamic character of the quotidian and its elevation to something special or extraordinary. Against this backdrop, I will focus on the process by which Morandi transcends the objects he depicts and goes beyond the mundane. Byung-Chul Han's term "Language of things"[5] described in his book "Non-things" becomes relevant in this context, namely to describe the epiphanic experience that emerges from a group of insignificant things and objects. Morandi sobriety is therefore in tune with great figures of meditative and contemplative experience. The priest Pablo d'Ors speaks of "everyday adventures"[6] in which creativity comes to our rescue and invaluable insights can occur even on a grey day. That is why the neutral tone of Morandi's paintings, which for the sceptics may seem to lack vitality, on the contrary, turns out to be small miracles. However, it is only by proving that this link between the everyday and the extraordinary takes place in a continuous and dynamic way and between different levels of the aesthetic that I will be able to prove the relationship of Morandi's art with everyday life, together with Thomas Leddy's arguments.

Due to the nature of our methodology, I have chosen not to mention specific paintings; despite the significance of certain artworks, this type of analysis is beyond the scope of our study. In every investigation, one path must be prioritized, and in this case, I have chosen to focus on Morandi's language and artistic process in the context of the aesthetics of the everyday. Notably, all of Morandi's paintings of objects are catalogued as "still life" followed by a number. Moreover, several objects are repeated in his paintings in new combinations, and the persistence of these objects, appearing repeatedly in different compositions, reveals Morandi's contemplative nature and the gradual assimilation of the aesthetic qualities of the objects he collected for depiction. Among these objects, we can highlight a striated white and blue vase, a spherical object, a round box, a white vase, a bottle, or a bowl, among other examples. In many instances, the same objects are depicted in three or four paintings, as well as in drawings or watercolours between the years 1920 and 1964.[7]

In view of his subject preferences, it is possible to recognize in Morandi mostly an obsession for some objects rather than a particular message behind a painting. The artist seems to fall in love with these humble things; we can imagine Morandi examining them in the twilight, trying to catch a dream with a cup or freeze it inside a worn-out bottle. But what's in a bottle? Not only from Morandi's view, but also from our own, in the sense that we all can appreciate beauty in the ordinary.

2 Leddy, "Experience of Awe."
3 Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*, 77.
4 Dewey, *Art as Experience.*
5 Han, *Não-Coisas*.
6 d'Ors, *Biografia do Silêncio.*
7 Pasquali, *Morandi.*

2 The Dilemma of Artistic Attributes in the Experience of Everyday Life

One of the strategies to value our experience of the everyday is to value it as such and, in fact, to be more aware and in tune with our daily experiences without necessarily making them something strange, and therefore to understand them in their intrinsic simplicity. This is for example the well-known argument of Saito[8] within the aesthetics of the familiar. Another approach would be to recognize in the experience of the ordinary something extraordinary. As stated in the opening, this perspective can lead us, among other things, to the sphere of art. However, when we speak of the aesthetics of everyday life, we are not exactly thinking of an aesthetic close to art with its institutional canons and more clearly defined evaluation criteria; we are considering, above all, the ordinary themes discovered in the domestic domain, in the daily routine, or in the scope of leisure, entertainment, and so on. So, even if these distinctions seem to have a reason in the first place, in my view, they started to function as a drawback to ordinary aesthetics and art when developed in a strict manner. Therefore, the relationship between both aesthetic modalities remains problematic. As Thomas Leddy suggests, the distinction between the aesthetics of art and the aesthetics of everyday life dissolves when we take the example of artists of our time like Joseph Beuys and Robert Rauschenberg (we know how their art could find inspiration in anything nearby).[9] But I may also add other artists to this list, such as the Italian movement of Arte Povera, which did not operate with the conventional combination of artistic practice, and did not consider qualitative differences regarding the ordinary and simple materials introduced into their work.[10]

Giorgio Morandi's art of the ordinary that we have been addressing probably contributed in its own way to Arte Povera from the late 1960s on. This is understandable, considering the artists of Arte Povera who, despite different convergences, relied on materials they picked up from daily life, a practice that was not usual in the field of the arts at the time (it was also visible in the work of the rising pop artists, but with a different approach). Morandi had already begun to choose worthless or abandoned objects as the subjects of his paintings several decades earlier. This attraction for impoverished subjects is also in tune with his frugal and ascetic life. A bachelor during his entire life, Morandi had his studio in a modest house, where he lived with his three unmarried sisters (I will look more carefully at his home and studio later).

That is why Morandi comes to mind when we read Bazon Brock's references to the ethics of Arte Povera, a discourse highlighted in Maiten Bouisset's book on this art movement: "This is how I see the artists of Arte Povera: as contemporary brothers of the monks. Their power of persuasion came from renunciation, their power from asceticism, and their vital energy from poverty. In their eyes, the most banal and insignificant object was a source of inspiration; they unveiled the most obvious everyday life as a mystery concealing knowledge and revelation."[11]

Of course, in this analysis, I also welcome discovering beauty in depleted and ordinary materials. And if the reliance on Thomas Leddy's theories favours this approach, there is however a sort of dilemma in it. First, I must emphasize that Thomas Leddy distances himself from Yuriko Saito, as he points out: "Saito says that experiencing the ordinary as ordinary offers the core of the aesthetics of the everyday, whereas I think that 'making it special' is what makes it possible to achieve that effect."[12] Leddy states that this mode of attention and experience may be linked to the emergence of an aura, labelling it as a pragmatist/romantic approach.[13] This position, in tune with my view on Morandi, is partly in opposition to Saito's restrictive approach, which rejects treating the experience of the ordinary as artistic, since in her view the investment of an aesthetic attitude in daily life could subvert its simplicity, distort it, and add an extra weight that would be

8 Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*.
9 Leddy, "The Nature of Everyday Aesthetics."
10 Ibid.
11 Bouisset, *Arte Povera*, 21.
12 Leddy, "A Deweyan Approach to the Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics," 13.
13 Ibid., 13.

inappropriate. It is this dilemma or paradox of the aesthetics of the ordinary (an appreciation of the ordinary with a special treatment that would supposedly abolish it) that Saito aims to avoid because "scrutinizing the object in the way that we do as a work of art corrupts the fluidity of everyday experience."[14] However, I believe this risk only exists when big distinctions are drawn between everyday experience and the experience of art, reducing the issue to just two poles: artistic or ordinary. But if we see aesthetics in terms of levels of aesthetic experience, as Leddy suggests, this risk is no longer so pressing since this experience can be understood in terms of continuity "on a spectrum of aesthetic intensity ranging from the most mundane to the most extra-ordinary and intense."[15]

3 Morandi and the Language of Things

I'd want to start out on this section by thoroughly discussing Morandi's contribution to this form of aesthetic experience, which ranges from the everyday to the level of art.

First, we should consider the artist's ascetic and humble life, without major events, which is also reflected in the environment of his house and studio. An old house in Bologna, with small rooms and common furniture, nevertheless gave the privileged visitors a feeling of dignity and charm, whose culminating point of fascination became, after crossing a few corridors, the mesmerizing space of the studio. Maria M. Lamberti, in an essay in which she refers to the development of the legendary figure of Morandi, describes this issue in a fine way:

> The identity between life and poetics that is revealed by the atelier will turn a visit to the studio on Via Fondazza into a topos of critical exegesis concerning Morandi, where the entrance into a separate world seemingly untouched by the passage of time coincides with the epiphany of the painter, so extremely taciturn, through the agency of his objects. Friends, collectors, and critics (often profiles coexisting in one and the same person, such as Lamberto Vitali) passed through the succession of rooms in the tiny apartment in order to enter and subsequently to describe the small and cluttered atelier like the culmination of a ritual, the site of deepest knowledge, the place of an unveiling, not of the practice, but of the poetics of painting and of painterly existence.[16]

This increasing amazement by visitors, which finds its apogee in the painter's place of creation, anticipates partly our argument about the aesthetic continuum, relative to Morandi's life, which seems inseparable from his art and studio, the unity between life and poetry Maria M. Lamberti refers to. Above all, what becomes decisive in this process is the main theme of his paintings: worn-out boxes and tins, jugs, bottles, and jars. All these humble and unremarkable items appear in the paintings as if in a silent or solemn pact, not very different from the type of furniture in his house, but described by some visitors with fascination, inhabiting or deployed in the studio in a curious way: On shelves, over tables, or even on the floor, in groups or dispersed, these objects keep a balance and suggest a magical atmosphere, as if the dust veil that covers them also contributes to a suggestion of a timeless placidity, a suggestion of eternity. This velvety layer of dust was probably intentionally left over in order to unify the objects that Morandi arranged for his paintings. In a way, the studio seems to progressively transport an entire apparatus of common objects to another time and atmosphere under the guidance of art. The studio thus reveals itself as an alchemical space of transformation of everyday life, a place that has an aura (I will examine this aura afterwards in a more comprehensive way). The nature of this space, which increases the inner visibility of the things chosen by Morandi, resembles the notion of "perspective of place" by the philosopher Byun-Chul Han, inspired by a text by Peter Handke about the jukebox:

> Things reveal the world. They produce visibility, while non-things destroy it. They open the viewpoint, or rather, the viewpoint of the place. A still life of the place emerges, in which everything is contiguous, framed in a silent community of things. The

14 Ibid., 12.
15 Ibid., 1–2.
16 Lamberti, *Morandi*, 246.

> magic of the jukebox consists in the fact that it fosters actuality, presence, and intensity for objects that may look insignificant, futile, unremarkable, ordinary, or that seem to be fading. The thing intensifies the being. We could say that ephemeral states obtain "articulations", or rather bones and skeletons. In this way, they gain duration.[17]

Therefore, the jukebox is both a thing and a symbol of a magical place. "It is not an isolated object but an entity of a place. It constitutes the center of a place."[18] Like Morandi's studio and his easel "It is the foundation of a place and enveloping it with silent contours."[19] Byung-Chul Han, however, emphasizes the character of thing of the jukebox, deriving from that a sort of magic of permanence. The understanding of the concept of "thing" and the tribute to it by this author have great correspondences with Morandi's universe. His timeless objects, the experience of presence, and the fascination they arise in friends who visit Morandi seem to resonate, in my view, with what Byung-Chul Han labels the "language of things." The philosopher is inspired by a text by Hugo von Hoffmannsthal about the epiphanic experience of simple things through contact and presence:

> It is an "arrangement of insignificant things," which becomes a source of silent and enigmatic wonder. In those moments of epiphany, the human being establishes a "new and premonitory relationship with all existence" and begins to think with the heart. It also includes moments of profound peace. The narrator longs for a language of things in which the mute things speak to me, and in which, in death, I may come to answer before an unknown judge.[20]

This sort of properties and language of things, which favour silence and the contemplative spirit, is quite close to Morandi's profile, which is characterized by asceticism, an almost monastic life in Via Fondazza, and being withdrawn in his art and daily life outside the hustle and bustle of large cities. This is the meaning of the question posed by the historian Peppino Mangravite, who confronts Morandi in one of the few known interviews with the artist:

> Peppino Mangravite: "I think that your vision of painting is clear, simple, and serene. "How did you arrive at this direction?"
> Giorgio Morandi: "It is very difficult for me to say. "I am afraid of words; that's why I paint."
> Peppino Mangravite: "Will you try, please, in any way you can, to tell me what led you to attain such results?"
> Giorgio Morandi: "I believe that my temperament and my nature, given to contemplation, have led me to these results; that is all I can say; it is difficult for an artist to give his reasons."[21]

Given his personality, the artist's desire for tranquillity is a constant longing in order to keep his peace of mind in the face of the greater demands he was having with the increasing fame of his artworks. It is important to highlight, at this point, this state of mind that benefits from silence, meditation, or a sort of mindfulness, which is sometimes referred to in the context of the aesthetics of daily life. Nevertheless, in this regard, the accounts of the priest and theologian Pablo d'Ors can clarify this approach in a unique way, as expressed in his inspiring book "Biography of Silence":

> In reality, even the greyest day is an incommensurate adventure for one who knows how to live it. Making the bed, cleaning the dishes, going shopping, taking the dog out, and so many other common chores are everyday adventures, but they are not any less exciting and even dangerous because of that. My meditation points out the adventurous, which is the same as saying extraordinary or miraculous, character of the ordinary.
>
> What really kills us is routine, and what saves us is creativity, that is to say, the capacity to glimpse and reclaim novelty.[22]

Even though Morandi had no intention of suggesting religious ideals with his artwork[23] (and also bypassed the metaphysical art of some of his contemporaries), his attitude and the spirituality evoked by his paintings (the inner light that comes from the compositions) put him in tune with pilgrims like Pablo d'Ors, even if his quest

17 Han, *Não-Coisas,* 99.
18 Ibid., 97.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 65.
21 Selleri, *Morandi*, 349.
22 d'Ors, *Biografia do Silêncio,* 39.
23 Roditi, *Morandi*, 353.

is art for art's sake. There is no doubt that Pablo d'Ors refers to some sort of creativity or skill that may rescue what turns out to be different and new in everyday life. This ability that we can recognize in Morandi is something he also recognizes in the artists he admires: "There is something grandiose, for instance, in a Cézanne still life or a Monet view of a riverbank. Even with a simple subject, a great painter can achieve a majesty of vision and an intensity of feeling to which we immediately respond."[24]

In this regard, Pablo d'Ors' speech almost seems like an extension of Morandi's attitude: "Enlightenment (that is, that light which occasionally turns on in our interior, helping us to understand life) hides in the most trivial acts and can arrive at any moment and through any circumstance."[25]

4 Emanation and Aura in Morandi's Art

I have maintained that Morandi's art appeals to a particular sense of the real, to an essence of things that does not fail to maintain a specific link with the aesthetics of the ordinary through the depiction of the common objects that inhabited his studio. In fact, maybe these objects interested Morandi since their appeal is in tune with his humble life, unconsciously allowing the artist to project the hidden beauty of his way of living. Another evidence of this are Morandi's landscape paintings, which, despite not being the main focus of this article, also reflect his involvement with the environment around him. In fact, the landscape paintings depict views from his courtyard on Via Fondazza or countryside depictions on the outskirts of Bologna stretching as far as Grizanna, the region in which Morandi found a retirement for almost a year during World War II. These reflect the experience of places in which he developed his life, but the way he paints them is not naturalistic, actually we sense a sort of simplification together with a particular light that transcends the everyday subject. These depurations and slightly abstract landscapes rendered by Morandi enter the realm of the extraordinary while keeping an antinomy, insofar as they preserve within themselves a memory of the experienced real record. In his enthralling book on Morandi, Bruno Smolarz describes, in a section, the artist's landscapes that reflect this approach; he calls our attention for Morandi's "real landscapes, internalized and sublimed, lived up; he takes the time to contemplate and observe them, impregnating with them, before painting."[26]

This sublimation resonates also with Thomas Leddy's arguments in his book "The Extraordinary in the Ordinary," which can help us to clarify Morandi's creative process. We could say that Morandi's paintings exhibit a sort of light or aura that moves us into another realm, it is a kind of inner light that seems to emanate when we look at them. Thomas Leddy describes in his book some advantages and features of this notion of "aura." First of all, there are several terms that Leddy refers to, regarding his aura conception in aesthetic experience: "shimmer," "sparkle," "shine," "glisten," "illuminate," or "gleam." These terms, as Leddy clarifies, relate to the emanation character of the aura, and I proclaim once again we can recognize this sort of inner light in Morandi's paintings and, most of all, in the objects depicted that became his signature as an artist. In this context, we should also mention that his slightly trembling brushstrokes reinforce this sense of shimmering light in the aura (his later watercolours are almost evanescent). Actually, through this vivid expression of the subjects in his paintings, we seem to enter another world. As mentioned, Thomas Leddy identifies this otherworldly feeling with an aural effect in his analysis of the aesthetic experience. In a way, the aura of Morandi's paintings may, at the same time, lift us into another world and deepen our experience of reality. This kind of antinomy that we will explore more extensively in Section 5 is also present in Leddy's description: We are lifted above the stream of life and "paradoxically this is also an experience of being more alive. Experience something, even in an ordinary thing, as having aura is experiencing it as being more real, more authentic, and more alive (in the metaphorical sense of that term) because lifted out of mere ordinariness."[27]

24 Ibid., 358.
25 d'Ors, *Biografia do Silêncio,* 49.
26 Smolarz, *Giorgio Morandi*, 110.
27 Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*, 143.

The term of aura proves to serve the expansion of the field of aesthetics, since its experiences belong to the continuum of intensity between the ordinarily seen and something beyond itself.

5 The Steps of Sensibility or the Antinomy of Everyday Life

The "expansive" conception of the aesthetics of the ordinary by Thomas Leddy, which is further developed in later writings, clarifies the notion of continuum that connects different experiences of the ordinary: "The relationship between the ordinary and the extraordinary is continuous and also dynamic, involving the constant interaction between different levels of the aesthetic dimension."[28] The reference to different levels of the aesthetic dimension is especially understandable in the intense aesthetic experiences evoked by Morandi's still life. These are in continuity with lesser intense events, such as the perception of objects in his studio, other rooms of his house, or even in different mundane contexts, for instance in second-hand shops where Morandi bought some objects that caught his attention (as it's known some of Morandi's objects were neglected items and he rejected to portray luxurious or sophisticated objects in his paintings). In fact, as Thomas Leddy suggests in several articles, there is a continuity between aesthetic experiences of small intensity and those of greater intensity of an artistic nature; this does not mean that all high-level aesthetic experiences are necessarily related to art. In fact, as the author says, "limiting aesthetics to art or art plus nature has disadvantages. It ignores the continuity between everyday life and the arts emphasized by John Dewey and more recently promoted by everyday aesthetes and aesthetes inspired by evolutionary theory."[29]

On the other hand, the author insists that restricting the scope of everyday aesthetics too much is also a mistake, since that seems to ignore the dynamic relationship between art and everyday life. Indeed, we should be able to experience the ordinary for its own sake, for the pleasurable or aesthetic experiences it provides and that life can elicit on its own. However, we should keep in mind that the highlights of everyday aesthetic experience sometimes become closer to the aesthetics of art, therefore favouring interaction and transit with the sphere of art. About his theory of the "continuum," Thomas Leddy suggests that the dynamic dimension of this continuum suggests how "something can exist at one level and yet be moved to another."[30]

Certain practices and rituals that are part of Morandi's creative process, which took place in his studio, help us to understand the creative process that takes place on this continuum through a dynamic process between various levels. According to a description by W. Haftmann of Morandi's atelier (retrieved by Renato Miracco), the artist was supported by "a table with three shelves." On the lowest shelf was a pile of objects that caught his eye. On the next one, there were objects "as they appeared while waiting to enter the scene," and on the highest, at eye level, were the things chosen, "in all their imperturbable solitude."[31]

This showcase with shelves, which served Morandi's artistic activity, can be an intermediate point between his everyday life and the aesthetic dimension of his paintings. They look like steps in an aesthetic staircase, which lead these objects to another level of experience where exceptional experiences take place.

As in Thomas Leddy's theses, we witness here the continuity of an experience that assumes different levels of interest and aesthetic intensity. The previous moment of the choice of objects is integrated into his experience in his studio. On this space, preferences and decisions take place through different stages, regarding decisions related to the objects of choice and evaluation of their different attributes. It is therefore possible to recognize the dynamic shifts in the artist's attention that result in the final selection of objects. In this context, we may understand Carlos Barberá-Pastor's approach to Morandi (in a text relating painting and architecture), when he states that:

28 Leddy, "A Deweyan Approach to the Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics," 15.
29 Leddy, "Defending Everyday Aesthetics and the Concept of 'Pretty'," 13.
30 Ibid., 10.
31 Miracco, *Morandi,* 303.

> The pieces seem to present the spirit of all the activities that Morandi develops before and after painting. It is he who constantly surrounds the jars. The essence is given by the presence of each object as he changes their position, as he distances them while looking. In the end, it seems that the act of painting is the least important thing, being more relevant everything that has happened before and after.[32]

Although I wouldn't go so far as to undervalue Morandi's painting process, it is true that what happens besides it (regarding actions before and after) can be just as intense. Overall, throughout the rigorous arrangement of the objects, from staging to painting, there is a whole lively process, a transaction between various levels of aesthetic intensity. This may include judgments, but also waiting and doubting, breakups between object sets, and finally decisive choices for specific paintings and projects. In a text in which Thomas Leddy refers to the experience of awe in everyday aesthetics, the author suggests the example of the artistic conception of a still life depicting fruit, which is quite relevant to our analysis of Morandi (even if the artist's still lifes included mostly man-made objects):

> Let's assume that the artist is painting a still life based on an arrangement of fruit. In attending to these pieces of fruit, the artist attends to their aesthetic properties, possibly capturing or highlighting them as he or she represent them. These properties could also have been noticed in the kitchen prior to collecting the fruit for use in the studio. In short, the aesthetic qualities encountered by the artist in the studio belong to the aesthetics of everyday life.[33]

I think that the continuity described here is one of the best ways to get past the basic contradiction or dilemma of everyday aesthetics, and Morandi's work shows this in a balanced way. As the Portuguese poet and critic Pedro Mexia says about Morandi's process, "the artist chooses the objects, arranges them carefully, and the objects are what they are: banal, everyday things, discarded items, without ceasing also to be something else: presences, essences, and archetypes."[34]

The objects are therefore two things at once, everyday artefacts and objects of an artistic nature, with a unique aura that brings us closer to the essence of things. This contradiction must however be maintained, even if Morandi's works aim at artistic expression and move away from the familiar connotations or the original functionality of the objects. The ritual in Morandi's atelier embodies the solution of a dilemma, so he retains a basic tension between the everyday and the extraordinary, raising it to an aesthetic dimension in which this contradiction acquires meaning. The fact that Morandi chooses banal objects is not, therefore, indifferent to his artistic process. Some reasons for his choices have already been mentioned and are understandable: Their simple and unremarkable appearance refers to the everyday and quiet life of Morandi (in the house inherited from his parents, where also lived with his three sisters), which cannot be separated from his creative process. This somewhat humble and banal trace of identity could have a dreary impact on the image of the artist, although this is sublimated by his work into an auratic special realm without at the same time excluding its ordinary character.

6 The Rescue of Everyday Life through Aesthetic Transfiguration

Despite the auratic and almost magical atmosphere that Morandi's art may convey at times, it should be said that the artist achieves his transfigurations without illusions or effects. The artist goes beyond the common aspect of things and their usual use value, starting by collecting the objects and accumulating them in his studio and this progressive process leads to a transformation. The function of use recedes, and the object becomes the property and passion of a subject. Baudrillard's writings on his classic book from the 60s "The System of Objects" regain importance here, putting forward important clues. In this case, the object that becomes property and a passion ceases to have a function and contrasts with the object of common use.

32 Barberá-Pastor, 726–7.
33 Leddy, "Experience of Awe," 12.
34 Mexia, *Imagens Imaginadas*, 81.

In fact, taken to the extreme, this "pure object, devoid of any function or completely abstracted from its use, gains a strict subjective status: it becomes part of a collection, and an object in the sense that the collector will say 'a beautiful object' instead of specifying it, for example as 'a beautiful statuette.' An object is no longer specified by its function, it is defined by its subject, but in the passionate abstraction of possession all objects are equivalent."[35] Indeed, Baudrillard argues that in this process one object alone is not enough and therefore it precisely implies a succession or series. This compulsion of the collector's acquisition of everyday objects may be seen in the light of Morandi's attitude of collecting and grouping things. In this operation, no object seems to overlap with the others, but there is a solemn interaction, eventually, the abstraction of a process of appropriation that refers to a subject: Morandi's possession of that which characterizes his surroundings and his daily life. A specific passage from Baudrillard reveals how these operations can be oriented towards art. As in Thomas Leddy, we recognize here a dynamic and continuous process of approximations within aesthetics: "Our ordinary environment is always ambiguous: functionality is forever collapsing into subjectivity, and possession is continually getting entangled with utility, as part of the ever disappointed effort to achieve a total integration. Collecting, however, offers a model here: through collecting, the passionate pursuit of possession finds fulfilment and the everyday prose of objects is transformed into poetry, into a triumphant unconscious discourse."[36]

If we finally return to Byung-Chul Han's insights, in his book about things, he also focusses on the figure of the collector (regarding the path between possession and experience), quoting Walter Benjamin, who raises the collector to a utopian figure, a future saviour of things. Could Morandi's mission also represent a personal effort to preserve the world? The meditative way of life that he revered appeared to be on the point of extinction. Moreover, Morandi likely became more aware of these losses when the growing reputation of his art deprived him of some of the serenity and tranquillity he so cherished. In the end, the substance of Morandi's pursuits allows us to testify the contrast between the course of the world and his retired life, which stands for this utopian character who can ultimately interpret our fate.

7 Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have explored various shades of Giorgio Morandi's work, suggesting his great attention to things that may seem unimportant at first sight. The artist's discovery of unexpected splendour and aura in common objects, but also in the landscape paintings of his surroundings, finally gives us some lessons that enrich our understanding of the aesthetics of the ordinary. The inspiration of Morandi's work emphasizes the importance of being in tune with the nearby reality, with what is part of our lives. Instead of seeking something extravagant, the truly extraordinary is simultaneously contained in the unremarkable, if there is an openness and willingness to embrace it. It is important to underline that Morandi's harmonious connection between life and art is impressive because it does not seem to put weight on life but rather seems to be the reason of its balance. Through Thomas Leddy's aesthetics of everyday life, I clarified how this balance relies on a natural continuity between the ordinary and art, favouring the expansive approach to the aesthetics of everyday life. This is partly due to the themes of Morandi's paintings, precisely because the topic of the objects is not a fancy selection, on the contrary, they are part of his environment and way of life. An issue that should be present in our conclusions is that Morandi contradicts the supposed archetype of the modern artist he exhibited rarely and didn't have the excessive competitive spirit that we see in the art world. On the other hand, we still witness the art world sometimes operating in a closed circuit and unfortunately being willing to embrace trends and abstract theories to justify feeble artworks. Morandi shows we can also learn outside the sophisticated spheres and uninspiring art market; his art opens our senses to what is real through an inner experience of the ordinary and our own "backyard." Because great art is not necessarily the

35 Baudrillard, "Subjective Discourse," 48.
36 Ibid., 49.

consequence of being startled by trends. Instead, we came across Morandi's slow creative process (not the execution of paintings, which was fast, but the whole ritual); his practices translate into artworks that evoke a sort of sublimation and a quality that endures, as I tried to show with the support of Byung-Chul Han's theories. We all seek for inspirations in our lives, but this is actually closer than we believe, in the simple actions and silent witnesses of our journey, just like the spiritual vocation of Pablo d'Ors, which we began by evoking in this text: "By walking more attentively, or paying more attention when brushing my teeth, for example, I was able to perceive the flow of water, its refreshing contact with my hands, the way I turn off the tap, the weave of the towel I use to dry my hands....Each sensation, as minimal as it seems, is worthy of being explored .... Living well means being always in contact with oneself [...]." The author finally directs the reflection towards his practice as a writer, which I allow myself to extend to the artist in general and can sum up like this: The artist is not only an artist when he creates his work, but always.

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