'Everything is designed to make an impression': the moralization of aesthetic judgment and the hedonistic ethic of authenticity

Ori Schwarz
Bar Ilan University

Abstract
Viewing both ethics and aesthetics as reflections of the social, cultural sociologists fail to thoroughly account for the complex interrelations between these realms. This article explores this relationship through a study of 'farterism', a discursive category that emerged in Israel during the 1990s and is used to denounce vain pretence. Not only do aesthetic surfaces operate as emotionally-laden shortcuts to deeper layers of ethical meaning; the very act of aesthetic judgment is moralized, subjected to normative regulation. The article analyses the use of 'farterism' in lay evaluation of architecture, restaurants and films, while reconstructing its implied ethic of aesthetic, 'the hedonistic ethic of authenticity'. I discuss this ethic's philosophical-cultural roots (including the performative contribution of critical social science) and the continuities between its application in cultural evaluation and in wider moral contexts. The pattern that emerges in the data relies on the Emperor's New Clothes tale: uncovering the hidden influence of the social on the aesthetic is at the centre of the normative regulation of aesthetic judgment. This allows laypersons to challenge cultural hierarchies shaped by cultural fields, experts and markets, and denounce them as corrupted by the social.

Keywords
Architecture, authenticity, cultural evaluation, cultural judgement, cultural sociology, ethic of aesthetic, pretension, remedial rituals

The design is laboured and cluttered. And everything is designed to make an impression! Pure farterism. You may love the (cold and flashy) style, you may like the exterior (which looks like a community centre in [a rich neighbourhood]), but the planning mistakes will remain nevertheless. I personally wouldn't live in this house even if they paid me. Anytime I would have opened the gate I'd get depressed from the sea of concrete. I wouldn't sleep dozens of meters and a whole floor away from my kids. Although walking 1 km to fetch a glass of water might be good for fitness' (a reader comment in an online architecture and design magazine)

Designing impressive houses of glass and concrete (or commissioning architects to do so) is an aesthetic choice, yet aesthetic choices like this one can (and often do) become an object of ethical critique. Sacrificing convenience—or even worse, good parenthood and family intimacy—in order to make an impression may stand in sharp contrast to the notions some people have about the right way to live. Thus aesthetic choices enter the realm of values.

While the relations between taste and social structure have been thoroughly explored in sundry studies of taste stratification, sociologists did not pay as much attention to the ethics of aesthetics, the normative frameworks that orient everyday aesthetic judgments and aesthetic choices of cultural producers and consumers, and which actors employ to ethically evaluate and criticize the aesthetic choices of others. Since its dawn (Durkheim 2010) sociology considered ethical and aesthetic judgments as parallel cultural phenomena and explored the relations of each with the social: their shared social origin (as ‘we are not the masters of our evaluations’: Durkheim 2010), the degree of their autonomy from the social (Alexander 1995) and their use as alternative resources in boundary work (Lamont 1992). In the vast literature on the sociology
of aesthetic and moral dispositions and judgments, starting with Bourdieu (1984), ethics and aesthetics share the status of dependent variables, each one of which can be explained by social structural variables.\(^8\)

While great progress has been made in exploring the social-aesthetic axis, the third side in the social-ethical-aesthetic triangle, namely, the relation between ethics and aesthetics, has remained the least explored and theorized (although see Lizardo & Skiles 2015 and the papers in this volume). Alexander (2010) conceptualized this relation as one of surface and depth, claiming that contact with aesthetic surfaces and their materiality provides emotionally-laden sensual experiences that transmit moral meanings, as iconic aesthetics is a shortcut to moral depth. Indeed, as shown below, aesthetics and its material surfaces are often experienced as shortcuts to deep moral meanings. Yet, the ways in which people aesthetically attend to objects and evaluate them are themselves laden with ethical meanings, subject to an ethic of aesthetic judgment.

Andrew Sayer suggested that while ethical evaluation tends to be more autonomous from the social than aesthetic judgment, both can be 'corrupted' by the social. He describes lay normativity as 'imperfect', with multiple 'slides' or 'slippages of meaning' between aesthetic, performative, economic and moral worth, yet laypersons employ critical capacity to reduce this 'corruption', striving to distinguish undeserved recognition, the good from the posh, worth from status, appearance from propriety and use-value from exchange-value (Sayer 2005). While highly appealing, this account of lay normative monitoring of aesthetic judgment is universalistic and a-historical, and can tell us little about the particularities of different ethics of aesthetics embedded within unique cultural, social and economic contexts.

This article explores such a common ethic increasingly used to judge, monitor and orient aesthetic and ethical judgments alike—the *hedonistic ethic of authenticity*. This ethic denounces as morally flawed any attempt to use aesthetic judgments to yield symbolic profits, such as praising or consuming objects of recognized value in order to feel worthy and be classified as worthy for one's 'good taste' or 'trendiness'. According to this ethic, virtuous taste judgments are those that ignore the recognized value of their object, its exchange-value; and are focused instead on its internal use-value. It is often assumed that the most unambiguous index of this internal value is the capacity to give pleasure. This ethic thus relies on an axiology which is both hedonistic (identifying the worthy with the pleasurable) and authenticity-oriented (identifying the worthy with the authentic).

Viewed from this perspective, those who claim they love and enjoy objects of recognized value are prone to suspicions of inauthenticity, i.e. of their judgments being determined by the social, regardless of the aesthetic qualities of the physical object and its capacity to give them pleasure.

This stands in sharp contrast to the situation several decades ago, when the desire to acquire good taste enjoyed much wider legitimacy. Thus, this particular ethic of aesthetic judgment seems to be characteristic of our time, even though the moral principles on which it relies—autonomy and introspection as sources of moral authority—have a much longer history (Taylor 1991). It is associated with the emerging strong moral sentiment against aligning aesthetic judgments with social evaluation (Warde 2007), and with a growing mistrust in cultural hierarchies as arbitrary conventions.

My analysis of this ethics relies on an empirical study of *falsanut* (literally: 'farterism'), a discursive category that emerged in Israel during the 1990s to denounce various cultural products, tastes, practices and people for their alleged instrumentalism and vain pretence (not unlike the English 'fancy-schmancy' and 'artsy-fartsy'). It is used by laypersons and cultural producers alike to doubt the authenticity and impartiality of aesthetic judgments and cultural objects; and to imply that social interests are hidden behind the alleged Kantian disinterestedness. Originally a slang word, it quickly gained huge popularity in speech and writing, including among the highly-educated, and was introduced into authoritative Hebrew dictionaries (for further discussion: Schwarz, 2016a). While similar suspicions were documented elsewhere (e.g. Friedman & Kuipers 2013; Halle 1994), the development of a unique discursive category to express them while negotiating cultural evaluation renders Israel an ideal locus to study this emergent ethic of aesthetic.\(^9\)

In various cultural fields the hedonistic ethic of authenticity and the notion of farterism supply laypersons with cultural resources that allow them to challenge stabilized cultural hierarchies and to resist various institutional mechanisms and aesthetic cues used by cultural industries to stabilize status hierarchies and mark value—including prestigious prizes and professional critique; market prices; and high-brow stylistic features that signal the value of cultural products. This notion is used to challenge the authenticity (and hence the value) not only of cultural consumption that constructs consumers as *culturally* worthy; but also of statements and judgments that construct the speakers' *moral* worth. In both cases actors use the notion of farterism to purify cultural judgment from traces of the social and to defend authenticity from encroaching instrumentalism. The case of farterism critique thus offers an opportunity to study the unique contemporary
ethic of aesthetics that organizes it, and the continuities between the ethic of aesthetics and wider moral frameworks, thus improving our understanding of the shifting complex interrelations between the aesthetic, the moral and the social.

**Methodology and structure**

I conducted content analysis of four data-sets of reader comments and user-reviews that address farterism in different cultural fields. Reader comments and user-reviews are anonymous, might be as short as a single sentence (although some contain several paragraphs), and their only verifiable context is the online conversation in which they take part. Yet, they offer invaluable unsolicited data on discursive patterns and classification struggles as they take place in online environments. Tracking farterism discourse across fields allowed me to both explore its unique manifestations in different fields, and identify and characterize common cultural logics these manifestation share, if such exist.

Set A consists of reader comments on articles published on the website of Israel's leading architecture and home design magazine, Binyan Vediyr (bvd.co.il). It consists of all reader comments referring to falltsanut and its declensions obtained using Google search engine in summer 2016 (n=160). BVD articles are normally dedicated to a single newly-built or newly-renovated house or apartment. Reader comments are written by both producers (architects and interior designers) and consumers. This dataset is of special interest, since houses are viewed as an extension of their owners, hence reader comments often refer both to aesthetics and stylistic features and to the owners' and designers' morality and character. While the analysis relies on all datasets, most examples are from set A.

This main set is supported with set B, consisting of all user-reviews that mentioned farterism and its declension in the Israeli user-review websites Seret, Sratim, and Opinion (n=91); and set C, consisting of data from Israel's most popular restaurant review website Rest, both collected in summer 2015. Due to the sheer amount of Rest reviews, I read all reviews for a highly diverse sample of 42 restaurants (diverse in terms of culinary genre, geographic region, pricing and status, ranging from high-end chef restaurants to coffee shops and casual eateries) and analysed all user-reviews that mentioned farterism and its declension (n=225). The culinary and cinematic fields were chosen for their differences: while cinema is an institutionalized field with critiques, scholars, festivals, foundations and prizes, a relatively high autonomy from the market, and nearly fixed ticket prices, the culinary field is less institutionalized, and relies heavily on market prices to signal hierarchies. Finally, set D consists of newspaper articles that refer to farterism from Haaretz, a respectable broadsheet that those most prone to be accused of farterism—culture professionals, academics and the liberal elites—are over-represented among its readers, authors and interviewees. I analysed all 149 occurrences of Farterism for the years 1994-2006 (I also read a similar number of later Haaretz articles, where the same patterns repeated).

The analysis focused on identifying the populations, stylistic characteristics, and meanings associated with 'farterism' in the various fields, as well as the motivations ascribed to the producers and consumers of 'farterist' objects.

The following two sections explore the aesthetic 'surface' of farterism, aesthetic styles prone to evoke suspicions of instrumentality and inauthenticity; and the moral meanings attributed to them. I then discuss the use of farterism in the ethical realm and the continuities between aesthetic and ethical judgment under the ethic of authenticity. The next sections address the cultural roots of the hedonistic ethic of authenticity; its relation to social science knowledge and hermeneutics; and its influence on the relations between laypersons and cultural industries (as it allows laypersons to challenge cultural hierarchies and sundry mechanisms used to stabilize them). I conclude by returning to the triangular relationship, discussing how lay sociological knowledge about the social-aesthetic relationship transforms the ethic of aesthetic and remoulds aesthetic evaluation and classification struggles. All citations throughout the article are from the data, unless stated otherwise.

**White on white: the ethical meaning of aesthetic surfaces**

"The farterism spreads in the land… there is no single BVD issue without an exemplar of this house—an aquarium full of empty spaces, huge windows, everything is white… this house has not skipped a single trend" (Set A)
It's the very definition of farterism. Throughout the first set of photos I thought they might have photographed in black and white because they have a thing for it. When suddenly the natural wood stairs appeared I was shocked. Such a boring, dull and gloomy design I haven't seen for a long time. The only pleasant space here is the playing room, because for some reason colour is for children only…” (Set A)

For Bourdieusian critical sociology, taste judgment is never truly disinterested as in Kant's ideal: it reflects and reproduces social structure (as cultural hierarchies reflect and justify social ones) and is used in struggles over social worth (as taste classifies the classifiers: Bourdieu 1984:6). The social always lurks behind the aesthetic, as judgments are directed to pursue symbolic profits even when actors act unreflexively, without engaging in conscious calculation or being aware of their own strategies. However, the fact that having the right taste (that is, the taste of the right people, the dominant class or the experts) or producing the right objects may yield symbolic profits is not a secret known to sociologists alone. My data indicate that suspicions that aesthetic judgments derive from social interests are quite common. The word 'farterism' is used to express these suspicions while denouncing aesthetic choices and judgments of cultural producers and consumers. Within my data, farterism accusations are addressed at cultural products in various styles and genres, including popular ones. However, certain surface aesthetics are strongly associated with farterism and especially prone to such accusations. The analysis would go then from the surface inward, starting the exploration of the hedonistic ethic of authenticity with an account of the morally suspicious surfaces of farterism.

The most typical sign of farterism in architecture is a 'cool' style: cool minimalist palette (in particular, extensive use of white and grey), 'cold' materials such as glass and concrete, and austere minimalism. This style was repeatedly characterized as 'impressive', 'clean', 'elegant' and highly-regarded, but as lacking in 'warmth' and 'homeness' (being too 'urban'): it is 'extrovert', made for 'show off', and is inhospitable. The coldness metaphor is meaningful, since coldness in people is associated with instrumentality. Reader-commentators suggested that cool design indicates the owners' coldness and lack of emotional authenticity. Contrariwise, houses praised as farterism-free were described as warm and homey, 'homes to live in', whose designs derive from their family function, not from desire to impress strangers. They are backstages, whereas 'farterist' houses are frontstages (repeatedly denounced as sterile 'museums', 'hotels' or 'showrooms'). For commentators, the home should be a personal space belonging to what Thévenot (2007) called the 'regime of familiar engagement', where choices should not be justified by general language, since worth does not rely on abstract evaluation criteria. Restaurants characterized as farterist in set C reveal a similar aesthetic: they are impressive, professional and beautiful, but cold, uncomfortable and formal. Farterist films and houses alike were described as 'impressive but boring'. In all fields 'farterist' aesthetics might be admirable but hardly lovable or enjoyable: being formalistic (giving priority to form over content, a modernist form of asceticism that signified good taste throughout the 20th century: Bourdieu 1984) it fails to give immediate sensuous pleasure.

Originality played a complex role: on the one hand, farterist houses were often described as unoriginal, copied, lacking personality: they reflect symbolic hierarchies and trends at a given moment rather than the unique personality of their owners. Owners were criticized harshly: 'your self isn't yours', 'it's all pose'. While sometimes commentators reluctantly admit these houses were beautiful, they denounce them as lacking 'soul', personality and authenticity. As a result, trendy elements (e.g. exposed brick walls) were qualified as 'farterist' ('touches of purple are trendy? So let's throw some purple'). Restaurants were similarly suspected of farterism simply for being trendy. Trendiness is a new evaluation criterion, a new form of cultural capital (Taylor 2009), and like its predecessor ('legitimate' high culture) it is often viewed as farterist and contrasted with authenticity (Michael 2015). While in the cinematic field suspicions were mainly directed to legitimate culture, that is, highly-regarded 'festival films' (reviewers occasionally mentioned a film was not farterist despite having won awards), in the architecture field farterism was mainly associated with trendiness. Trendiness was perceived as unoriginal and too easy a way to make an impression and gain recognition, requiring much smaller investment than true professional expertise in design.

On the other hand, attempts to be original and unique at all cost were similarly denounced, especially when trying to distinguish oneself from the environment (thus, a modernist house in a country village was accused of 'farterism' for its 'blatant and arrogant, pretentious and bourgeois architecture') or when originality seems to be achieved by scarifying harmony, coherence or practical comfort. This was evident in all datasets: unusual combinations (e.g. figs, tuna, yoghurt and tahini) or stylistic innovations and unusual
stylistic choices (e.g. hectic camera movements) were viewed as 'farterist' laboured attempts to distinguish oneself and come across as artistic and unique while scarifying diners' or viewers' pleasure. As one reviewer puts it, 'apparently gourmet in Israel is a code for farterism. The chef (...) constructs courses from a medley of inexplicable flavours; despite the beautiful presentation and relatively-aesthetic plating, the tongue remained confused'. Giving children unusual names, using rare words, or unusual combinations between cinematic genres were all accussed of farterism, as their originality seemed to be nothing but an instrument of distinction. While conformity had long been perceived as a threat to authenticity, in late capitalism originality poses a similar threat, as differences are commodified and used as resources (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005). Both trendiness and strategic distinction fail to comply with the ethic of authenticity, where legitimate judgments and choices only gain authority from within.

Other stylistic features associated with farterism are seriousness (films and their audiences were described as farterist for lacking humour and taking themselves too seriously, whereas a farterist-free house was praised for its 'sense of humour'; hierarchies are more stable when the illusio of the field is taken with serious awe, hence excessive seriousness is often identified with the privileged classes: Friedman and Kuipers, 2013; Warde, 2007); flowery speech (articles that philosophized or used pompous oversophisticated language while discussing architecture and art were accused of farterism for allegedly trying to inflate the symbolic and material value of the objects they discussed through the magic of words, producing value ex nihilo. Flowery writing in restaurants menus was viewed as farterism verging on consumer fraud); and more generally promotionalism (Wernick 1991; investment of restaurants in PR and design was often believed to come at the expanse of investment in food itself).

Ulterior motives and the moral self

'Farterist' houses are those where design decisions were made based on social status and distinction considerations that lack moral legitimation. Owners are accused of showing off either their wealth ('only money talks', '500 sq. m. of bad taste and vulgarity whose only purpose is yelling "we have, we have!!"') or their cultural capital ('they put two armchairs by a famous designer to convey it's a place of sophisticated people who are in the know'), as the house 'bears witness to its owners' character: condescending, nearly monstrous ego…'. The architects and designers of these houses are similarly accused of being motivated by their own interests (e.g. professional status). Abstract design-concepts are often suspected of farterism, especially if they do not contribute to the residents' sensuous experience (e.g. a form that can only be seen from a bird's-eye view). Contrariwise, the farterism-free house does not serve the designer's 'whims' or the owners' impression management: it is 'pleasant' and serves 'the needs of the family' that lives there.

Similarly, the farterist restaurant is visited in order to 'see and be seen' or 'feel in the scene', ulterior motives related to social status. Their diners sacrifice their enjoyment (pleasant atmosphere, tasty food) for status, while their chefs allegedly do the same, maximizing their symbolic and economic profits through decorative plating, creative dish names and sophisticated and innovative combinations while sacrificing taste.

In all these cases cultural production and consumption are castigat for being oriented to maximize arbitrary and socially-defined exchange value rather than use value. The latter is assumed to be real, material and related to sensuous experience, of which aesthetic experience is a main component (alongside practical features such as comfort). The label 'farterist' is used to point at the social hidden behind the allegedly pure aesthetic realm, and ethically denounce it.

Some of the aesthetic features enumerated above—such as formalism in films and architecture, or cold design—seem unlikely to give sensuous pleasure, thus raising suspicions that they are prayed and consumed as a form of conspicuous consumption, to demonstrate financial capital, cultural capital or trendiness. These flawed inauthentic motives—which Rousseau criticized as the disease of non-egalitarian societies, where 'people no longer seek what pleasures them but seek rather what distinguishes them '(Rousseau, 1979:340, cited in Meyer 2000:41)—are the moral sin associated with certain surface aesthetics.

In all datasets farterism was identified not only with aesthetic features, but also with social groups: the 'bourgeois' and the residents of high-end neighbourhoods and towns. The tastes of the privileged are associated with farterism not only because of class resentment or habitus differences, (as accusations of farterism were also made by members of the same privileged groups), but also because these tastes enjoy legitimacy merely by being associated with dominant groups, hence they seem more likely to be overrated or adopted for ulterior (social) motives rather than for aesthetic ones.

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Farterism accusations in the data were made within the context of aesthetic evaluation of style and design, coherence and beauty, taste and artistic expression. Yet, they simultaneously addressed a deeper level signified by the aesthetic surface, an ethic of aesthetic judgment, of the kind of considerations that should be taken in aesthetic evaluation. Like moral judgment in general, these judgments evoked strong emotions; and were addressed not at a single act within an isolated situation but rather at an assumedly stable moral subject (Tavory 2011). Commentators judged not only 'farterist' houses, but also the moral character of owners and designers which they read in these houses, accusing them of arrogance, detachedness, inhumaness, condescension, vain, coldness and dullness. This moral dimension explains why stylistic debates over issues such as kitchen centres or exposed brick walls can get so emotional, and why design can evoke 'repulsion' and 'disgust'.

**When sin and alibi switch roles: noble ethics as farterism**

'Noga Michanovsky, 20, from Ramat Hasharon, wanted to be a paramedic. She didn't want to be a clerk in the army. Medicine had always fascinated her so "it was a winning combination", she says. "I didn't want to clutch a knife between my teeth and slaughter terrorists, not at all", she jokes, "But I did want to do something of value. It may sound farterist, but I didn't want a home front job, I wanted an interesting job, for the [job] experience, the experiences, the character-building. During the [paramedic trainings] course I was considered a posh girl from Ramat Hasharon blah-blah-blah, so I wanted to prove to myself that I could cope with tough situations". (Dataset D)

The word 'farterism' is usually used to qualify cultural tastes, cultural products and their consumers. However, in dataset D it was also used to characterize patriotism, conscientious objection to military service in the Palestinian occupied territories, historical sense of national belonging, a sense of professional or artistic vocation, belief in intergroup dialogue, idealism, critical moralism, religious or political progressiveness, sympathy with oppressed groups (the proletariat or the Palestinians), and spirituality. All these phenomena have something in common: They are all ways of speech, action and feeling perceived by some as epitomizing noble moral ideals (be they liberal-cosmopolitan or national ones), hence they can confer upon individuals moral worth. Presenting oneself as caring for (or being motivated by) noble causes or values may offer easy symbolic profits, but hence it is also vulnerable to farterism accusations. The same suspicions directed at high culture or trendiness in the aesthetic realm are directed at noble values in the moral realm.

Against these hypothetical suspicions (or 'virtual offences': Goffman 1971) actors engage in two kinds of remedial rituals (Goffman 1971) to fend off unwelcome interpretations. In the first tactic the virtual offender adopts the perspective of the suspicious audience: immediately after addressing noble causes or referring to their own noble motives, speakers admit that 'it might sound farterist'. Some go further to admit they would probably consider it farterist themselves 'had a stranger told me such things'. The speakers thus demonstrate reflexivity, showing that they share with their audience the values and critical perspective of the authenticity ethic. They explicitly address the virtual charges, deny them, and sometimes present evidence to protect themselves or others from farterism allegations (thus, a senior officer interviewed about one of his soldiers who refused to serve in a settlement remarked the soldier was not a 'leftist farterist', i.e., was not motivated by his desire to come across as progressive. He further described how the soldier kept serving for years despite his moral difficulties to substantiate his claim about the soldier's 'sincere dilemma'). These remedial rituals are also common while discussing high culture, tourism or gastronomy: when a Haaretz food columnist praised a small restaurant in Provence, she first apologised: 'it's exactly the kind of materials that any satirist would have a field day with: Provence, a little far-flung mountain village, a restaurant nobody has ever heard of…’ Similarly, a designer told Haaretz ‘I don't want to sound farterist, but I make objects that hold light inside them, it's not even lamps. I never call it lamps'.

The second (and even more surprising) tactic is uncovering the self-interest behind the apparently noble act. The female soldier cited above offers such a remedial account: she first cites her desire 'to do something of value', but immediately admits it 'may sound farterist' and explains that her real motives were self-development, self-empowerment and experiences—explanations borrowed from the psychotherapeutic repertoire, which are in line with the self-realization ideal associated with the authenticity ethic.
The result seems paradoxical at first glance: if Goffman's actors used remedial rituals to reinstate their commitment to moral ideals and correct the impression of a gap between these ideals and reality, here remedial rituals come immediately after acts or statements that conform to sacred ideals, and 'correct' them by revealing the gap between hidden motives and noble ideals, backstage and frontstage, revealing self-interests rather than concealing them. However, this paradox is only apparent: it simply indicates the sacred status of authenticity, a moral ideal no less powerful than progressive humanism or nationalism. From this ethical perspective, the sin of farterism, of disguising self-interest as noble, is far worse than self-interest itself. Hence, for Michanovsky it was better to admit the legitimate self-interested motivation of self-realization than the illegitimate motivation of calculated self-presentation. The rehabilitation of self-interest and pursuit of individual happiness is widely associated with neoliberalism. The delegitimation of calculated presentation-of-self relies on more complex cultural and economic developments (including those studied by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005)), which are discussed below. Studying remedial interchanges thus reveals an ethical transformation in the hierarchy of sins.

When art, good taste and originality (in the aesthetic realm); and altruism, universalism, progressiveness and patriotism (in the moral realm) are viewed as merely demonstrations of promotionalism (Wernick 1991), instrumental moves in claiming self-value and constructing a valuable self, then sincerity about one's hedonism and self-interestedness turns into a virtue. Politics of authenticity such as Donald Trump's assault on 'political correctness' and 'phoney politicians', and the cultural politics of farterism critique might be the only form of virtue left.

My findings join earlier studies that challenged the assumption (common among sociologists and laypersons alike) that social reality is about selfish interests which are then legitimized by being misrepresented as reflecting noble values. Nina Eliasoph (1998) and Lyn Spillman (2012) showed that sometimes self-interest is itself an alibi, the most accessible way to give meaning and justify actions which are actually motivated by wider commitments or solidarity. The rise of the authenticity ethic explains why in some contexts alibi and sin switch roles: while being self-interested is naturalized and legitimated, showing commitment to sacred ideals is prone to be suspected of inauthenticity.

**The emperor has no clothes**

'The emperor has no clothes' was a phrase repeatedly used by user-reviewers. This deserves attention, since metaphors and myths often condense rich and complex cultural meanings. In Hans Christian Andersen's tale *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, the emperor’s clothes are a social construction lacking substantial existence. This social fiction is sustained by the subjects' fear that admitting they cannot see them would hurt their own status, publicly qualifying them as stupid. The only threat to this social fiction is the authenticity of a virtuous child, who sincerely describes what he sees while disregarding his own symbolic interest. This heroic authentic act unleashes the truth. While the social fiction relies on the belief that evaluation requires (and hence testifies to) cultural competence, actually the truth is democratically accessible to all, even to a child.

The authors, reviewers and commentators who criticized farterism in the data preferred the child's role to the dupes', hence they looked for traces of the social (and social motives) in cultural products and in aesthetic judgments of others. However, assuming these two alternatives and preferring the former is not obvious; it relies on a highly ethical ethic of authenticity.

In the last half a century, authenticity has played an increasingly central role as an ethical principle that orients and justifies action in various life-spheres (from sexuality to politics, from music to education, from career choices to emotional performances), and as an axiological principle in the moral evaluation of others (e.g. Grazian 2010, Schwarz 2013, 2016b, Vannini & Burgess 2009). This self-referential ethics prescribes introspection as a source of moral authority (Taylor 1991). Being true to oneself requires autonomy from the judgments of others and from stabilized cultural hierarchies. Since its nascence (often ascribed to Rousseau and Herder), the authenticity ethic has taken many distinct forms in different philosophical traditions and various everyday manifestations. Reay (2002) distinguished between conflicting classed ethics of authenticity; whereas Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) explored how the authenticity ideal evolved historically, together with capitalism it used to criticize, transforming from an ideal of emotional sincerity to focus on individuality, autonomy and uniqueness, and later on spontaneity, acting without calculation. In this latter form, the ethic of authenticity is clearly a reaction to contemporary capitalism, heroizing behaviours that appear as breaking out of Weber's iron cage of instrumental rationality.
Farterism critique and its ethic of aesthetics rely on this latter version and are influenced by recent transformations in capitalism. Judgments and aesthetic choices likely to yield symbolic (not to mention material) profits are thus suspected of inauthenticity, of being aimed at yielding profit rather than candid spontaneous evaluations. Once the social is revealed behind the aesthetic (and the ethic), the ethic of authenticity may encourage actors to either re-purify the aesthetic from the social, i.e. aspire and praise judgments and cultural objects perceived as authentic, non-instrumental; or doubt the very possibility of authenticity. Both paths are documented in my data. Thus, warm modest interior design in set A and restaurants that focused on the food while avoiding investment in interior design, PR and branding in set C were praised for their anti-farterism. However, often the same conduct praised as farterism-free by some was denounced as farterist by others for the very same reasons. Simplicity, for example, can be an instrumental farterist value-claiming strategy no less than over-sophistication, and even farterism critique was denounced as farterist (as criticizing farterism may itself yield symbolic profits).

While the same cultural objects, practices and judgments can be (and are) framed as either farterist or anti-farterist, authentic or inauthentic, purging the hidden traces of the social from judgment becomes a central strategy in struggles over evaluation.

Lay sociology and the performativity of critical knowledge

This strategy toward aesthetic evaluation shares significant similarities with common strategies in the social sciences and in critical cultural sociology in particular. Claiming that aesthetic judgments are ‘social’ amounts to saying they are shaped by social institutions and mechanisms; and may hence reflect social conventions or social hierarchies and serve social interests. Over the last four decades, this was the basic premise of the sociology of art, which has specialized in mapping and exploring exactly these institutions and mechanisms. Concepts such as ‘art worlds’ (Becker 1982) and ‘fields of cultural production’ (Bourdieu 1993) were developed to theorize the production, stabilization and transformation of cultural value and its hierarchies qua social constructions. Sociologists studied how cultural value is shaped by cooperation and struggle between various actors: young and established artists, gatekeepers (e.g. curators and editors), scholars, journalists, prize juries (English 2005) and critics (who are privileged to shape evaluation standards and construct narratives that supply works with meaning and value: Becker 1982). Sociologists also explored how markets contributed to the social construction of cultural value, as prices operate as proxies for cultural value, performatively shaping demand rather than simply reflecting it (Velthuis 2003). Despite significant disagreements, all aforementioned art sociologists and many others agree that aesthetic judgment is socially shaped.

Bourdieu’s critical sociology in particular seems closest to Farterism critique, as it critically targets judgment, revealing its lack of autonomy from the social in order to criticize its role as a social weapon, an instrument of power. For Bourdieu (1984) aesthetic judgment both reflects social structure (through the mediation of the habitus that translates objective positions into subjective tastes) and serves social interest (distinction and boundary drawing). While cultural fields are defined by a degree of relative autonomy, they eventually reflect broader social hierarchies, as the dominant classes have more symbolic power to impose their preferences and use culture for distinction. This social truth of judgment was allegedly hidden even from those who capitalized on their tastes (who may do so without being cynical, truly believing in the purity of their judgment). Bourdieu’s critical project was revealing the allegedly-hidden social truth of aesthetic judgment, thus reducing their power as social weapons.

However, the close relationship between the social and the aesthetic is not—at least no longer—a secret kept among sociologists. It is apparent to and criticized by both cultural producers and mediators and laypersons who employ farterism critique, as documented in my data.

The farterism discourse supplies laypersons with cultural resources to challenge all the aforementioned hierarchizing mechanisms. Time and again the notion of farterism was used to stress that being expensive, prize-winning, trendy, prestigious, high-status, of high-brow genre (or having its stylistic features that function as status cues), unique, impressive, or posh—does not indicate the quality of a cultural product. Indeed, it might indicate the opposite. User-reviewers repeatedly challenged professional critics, uncovering their alleged ulterior motives and their moral faults from an authenticity ethic perspective, for example:
I don't know from where your "critic" Yair Hochner borrowed his strange ideas while writing about this film, but it is most evident that he tries to demonstrate his farterist cinematic erudition at the expense of [sharing an] unbiased, sincere reaction to viewing this high-quality piece.

Critics were also accused of exercising symbolic violence, 'proving to the readers how ignorant they are, which obviously proves how smart the critics are compared to them'. Trendiness is another kind of inauthentic corruption, e.g. when diners choose to be treated badly, sit on uncomfortable chairs, or pay excessive prices in a trendy well-designed restaurant in order 'to feel part of the scene'. Prices were similarly discarded as proxies of value: a user-reviewer who claimed that 'good food isn't measured by its price, even if it's expensive it doesn't necessarily means it's worthy'; whereas a BVD reader asked rhetorically 'Isn't it time for BVD (a magazine I really love, by the way) to stop making a big deal of every disgusting thing only because it costs much????' Prizes were not merely challenged but actually interpreted as farterism alarm bells, indicating status without worth. Thus, farterism critique addressed all the social sources of cultural value identified by sociologists in order to morally disqualify them for failing to meet the standards of the hedonistic ethic of authenticity. Like Bourdieusian sociologists, farterism's critics uncover the social nature of judgment in order to criticize it.

Farterism critique and the social sciences share more than surface strategies: both enact a neoliberal subjectivity. The social sciences have not only explored disenchantment processes associated with modernity, but joined the disenchantment project. Sociology, psychology, anthropology and (both mainstream and Marxist) economy have joined the effort to disenchant apparently autotelic sacred phenomena such as religion, art, altruism, gifts, the family and romantic love, and explain them in terms of instrumental rational actions of individuals. Sociologists suggested that individuals can act strategically even unknowingly to serve their presentation of self (Goffman 1959) and their material and symbolic interests (Bourdieu 1977). The social sciences promoted suspicion towards the surface of reality, the sacred, and human consciousness itself (Ricoeur 1970). Critical scholars in cultural studies, gender, queer and postcolonial studies, post-structuralist philosophy and cultural sociology joined forces to challenge the belief in the autonomy of knowledge, culture and cultural hierarchies from society and its structures of power, thus laying the foundation for political struggles over cultural canons and curricula, prizes and budgets. Representing culture (and human action and interaction in general) as a mere struggle for power was aimed at challenging existing order and social hierarchy, yet it reproduces the politics of force it tries to fight, leaving no open space for alternatives (Thévenot 1999 cited in Eliasoph 2007). The rise of neoliberal subjectivity is attributed to economics and psychology ever since Foucault (Hamann 2009, Rose 1999), yet critical social scientists have similarly used variants of the maximizing instrumental homo economicus, in ways that might have performatively contributed to its enactment.

Farterism critique is one of several cultural practices indebted to the school of suspicion in social theory (Ricoeur 1970), such as contemporary conspiracy theories. The latter were dubbed 'pop sociology' for incorporating critical (mainly Frankfurt School) sociological theories and assumptions (Harambam and Aupers 2015). Indeed, tracking paths of diffusion and spillover of academic critique and moral sensitivities is a challenging task. It might be impossible to completely exclude the possibility that the similarities between farterism critique and the critical social sciences are mere coincidence. It seems however more plausible that academic discourse supplied farterism critique with cultural legitimation, if not inspiration. Circumstantial evidence includes the proximity in time between the emergence of farterism critique and a lively public debate over cultural relativism and post-modernism in Israeli media; and the explicit use of critical social science knowledge in political struggles over cultural hierarchies (e.g. in the destigmatization of Israeli Middle-Eastern pop). Fully understanding farterism critique and the hedonistic ethic of authenticity thus requires that we turn the spotlight to the knowledge and hermeneutics of social science itself, and critical cultural studies and cultural sociology in particular—disciplines that professed both the belief that aesthetic and moral judgments reflect hidden private interest and social power-relations; and the uncovering of these hidden truths as a political project of liberation.

Remoulding struggles, moralizing aesthetics

By uncovering the ulterior (social) motives behind aesthetic evaluation and the hierarchies of cultural fields, farterism accusations threaten to collapse the autonomy of these fields. But has farterism critique transformed power relations? The capacity of laypersons to challenge the aesthetic judgments and value signals of cultural industries and experts (and the cultural hierarchies they imply) is contingent upon the
cultural resources at their disposal. Farterism critique disseminates doubts regarding aesthetic value throughout social space, stressing the difficulty of telling the aesthetic from the social, the good from the posh, thus equipping laypersons with a powerful language of critique.

However, this critique did not result in reversing hierarchies. Despite growing suspicions that cultural production and consumption are corrupted by social motives, laypersons (unlike Bourdieusian sociologists) rarely claim that all hierarchies are arbitrary and all judgments are merely a social game. As a result, farterism accusations have remoulded evaluation struggles without collapsing fields altogether.

Houses that were praised for not being farterist were often criticized (occasionally by the same speaker) for not being 'designed' enough ('where is the design?') or lacking a coherent 'concept'. Since farterism accusations were directed at works that seemed to reflect professional ideals and were allegedly created in order to garner esteem, those works devoid of farterism could easily be (and were) accused of being amateurish. Commentators expressed disappointment from these houses, repeatedly claiming that for homey pleasant atmosphere there is no need for professional designers or architecture magazines.

For the same reasons, in all the fields surveyed in my research, those who criticized high-status objects as farterist or praised as farterism-free cheap, untrendy or low-brow objects lacking recognized social worth—risked disqualifying themselves as lacking cultural competence to judge. They were also accused of having their own judgment biased by social ulterior motives such as envy of the rich (critical BVD commentators were explicitly accused of criticizing houses they could not afford out of 'envy') or resentment towards cultural elites. Another accusation against those who criticized farterism was that they were themselves trying to yield symbolic profits by demonstrating their resistance to trendiness and to stylistic features used as status markers, thus committing the same sin they denounced. Farterism critique was then fended off by the same cultural logic it employed—morally disqualifying the aesthetic judgment of others by uncovering its hidden social motives (constructing oneself as worthy, or devaluing goods one cannot reach), that is, its inauthentic sociological instrumentalism.

Rather than collapsing or reversing hierarchies, farterism critique remoulded aesthetic evaluation by moralizing it, as debates over cultural value take new forms and reorganize around issues of authenticity. The relations between the aesthetic, the ethic and the social are reformulated, as the ethical imperative of authenticity demands purifying the aesthetic from the social. Farterism critique thus reshapes not cultural hierarchies themselves as much as the cultural evaluative repertoire available to criticize and defend them.

Michael (2015) found that while trendiness has a recognized value, it is also discarded and scorned as inauthentic (even among those most prone to be considered trendy), as too easy a way to gain recognition, or as involving too much effort, that is, calculative instrumentalism. My study of farterism critique in Israel shows how any kind of socially recognized exchange value—moral or aesthetic, economic market value or symbolic value within the hierarchy of a cultural field—is prone to similar suspicion and criticism. Michael's findings are then one important example of a general pattern: the rise of a new hegemonic ethic of aesthetic judgment. Evaluation struggles and aesthetic repertoires of justification take a new shape, as the ethic of authenticity reorganizes aesthetic debate. While critique of pretension and snobbery is surely not a new invention, the emergence of a public language in the 1990s that allows actors to easily dismiss recognized value claims by raising lay-sociological suspicion, is a significant change, as well as the wider trend of growing suspicion that cultural status hierarchies are corrupted by the social.

This study explored the least studied side of the social-ethical-aesthetic triangle, the ethical foundation of aesthetic judgment and its transformation. My aim in doing so was not to challenge existing knowledge of the other sides of the triangle: the social surely informs both aesthetic and moral judgments (even if farterism critique is common across classes and cannot be easily mapped to a position in social space). My aim was rather to complement existing accounts by paying attention to another important though understudied factor that influences the content and transformation of aesthetic judgments. While aesthetic judgments surely vary with social position, they may also transform following transformations in ethical sensitivities.

The ethic and the aesthetic do not cease to be influenced by the social, and sociological insights of Bourdieu and others remain helpful in understanding these influences. However, the representation of this influence in common discourses changes it, as theories of human action are performative (Hacking 1995). Sociological models must then be adapted to account for their theory effect. Knowledge about the social foundation of the aesthetic has transformed the criteria and arguments used while socially debating over (and thus constructing) the value of aesthetic products. This disenchanted awareness may be viewed as an antidote to symbolic violence, but also as critical sociology's contribution to the enactment of neoliberal subjectivity. Either way, the delegitimation of cultural hierarchies and their symbolic violence has
remoulded the content and dynamics of the classification struggles studied by Bourdieu. The case of farterism demonstrates that shifts in cultural repertoires and ethical frameworks may inform aesthetic judgment and remould classification struggles. The ethic of aesthetic is thus not merely epiphenomenal. When uncovering the relationship between the social and the aesthetic becomes a foundation of the ethical orientation of aesthetic judgment, the ethic and the aesthetic can no longer be perceived as two parallel lines, two different screens on which the social is projected.

**Bibliography**


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Biographical Note

Ori Schwarz is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Bar Ilan University and co-director of Bar-Ilan Center for Cultural Sociology. His research interests include sociological theory and cultural sociology. His studies on the sociology of authenticity explore the ethics of authenticity and its influences on ethics of choice, ethnic minorities in the middle-classes, the presentation of self in social network sites such as Facebook, and judgement and aesthetic evaluation in various fields, from cinema to grief performances in funerals. He has also published extensively on digital culture (including the uses of digital photography in various fields from sexuality to religious rituals; digital memory; and political unfriending on Facebook) and on the sociology of the senses (on the role of sonic styles and sonic sensitivities in boundary work).

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1 This should not be confused with Maffesoli's (1991) used of this term, i.e. the emerging use of aesthetics (instead of ethics) as a social glue for tribal groupings and affective collectivities.

2 Bourdieu (1984) recognized the role of ethical considerations in taste judgments of the dominated classes who do not practice pure aesthetics. However, within his framework the ethic and the aesthetic remain parallels: both are projections of the social, evaluation schemata shaped by social position. Their interrelation, e.g. the power of new ethical frameworks to reorganize aesthetic evaluation across class (Schwarz 2016a) can hardly be recognized within this framework.

3 While the emergence of this ethic is evident in multiple countries, the development of a public code in Israel might be influenced by Israel's old national ethos of directness, down-to-earth attitude and suspicion of fancy words (Katriel 1986), as well as by the swift economic liberalization and introduction of class distinction through consumer lifestyle in the 1990s.

4 However, while promising to liberate individuals from the judgments of others and group norms, this ethic eventually encourages them to act in ways likely to be recognized as authentic, which might be no less oppressive (Schwarz 2016b).

5 Cultural goods turned more vulnerable to suspicion as the economy has shifted away from the Marxian labour theory of value (also shared by Bourdieu 1984): small investments (e.g. in trendiness; Taylor 2009) may yield large symbolic profits; whereas the sign-value (the added value of branding and advertising) becomes ever more prominent, reorganizing capitalist economy around the industrial production and commodification of difference (Baudrillard 1998; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005).

6 E.g. in the political critique of the exclusion of African-American from literary prizes: English 2005.