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Introduction

Martin Drenthen and Jozef Keulartz

Environmental aesthetics has a long history. During the period of Enlightenment and early Romanticism, nature was seen as *the* paradigm of aesthetic experience and judgment. This gradually changed in the nineteenth century when the focus of philosophical aesthetics gradually shifted from nature to art. This changed again in the late 1960s when environmental aesthetics emerged as a new discipline in reaction to the growing popular and political concerns over environmental degradation and destruction.

Empirical Versus Speculative Aesthetics

However, from the start the new discipline of environmental aesthetics displays a split personality, a Janus face with an empirical and a philosophical side that seem to be in constant disagreement. Initially, in the first decades, empirical research developed much faster than philosophical reflection. "Speculative" aesthetics was looked upon by empirical aesthetics with some disdain as arm chair discipline that takes place in a study or in a library.

A case in point is psychologist Daniel Berlyne, who developed a very influential theory of landscape perception and appreciation.¹ Berlyne sees "speculative" aesthetics as limited by the subjective analyses of its adherents. "Its conclusions may reflect elitist and idiosyncratic ideas about what aesthetic interpretations, values and norms *ought* to be. The scientific researcher, on the other hand, is *objective* and detached from the research process. Consequently, the concrete facts which result from the research are less prone to bias and interference."²

Douglas Porteous' comprehensive book *Environmental Aesthetics: Ideas, Politics and Planning* from 1996 still doesn't fully recognize the contribution of philosophy to the discipline of environmental aesthetics. According to Porteous, "very few modern aesthetic philosophers have cared to venture beyond the art gallery."³ Ronald Hepburn is briefly mentioned as an exception, but then again, only "few philosophers have followed Hepburn's attempt to come to grips with environmental aesthetics."⁴ Porteous concludes that the philosophy of aesthetics leaves us empty-handed and that we have to turn to empirical and experimental research to understand our reactions to our environment.

In the second half of the 1970s, philosophers started to fight back and to criticize empirical research designed to map public landscape preferences by assessing and measuring responses to environmental stimuli. Most empirical work takes place in a laboratory or quasi-experimental setting in which environmental stimuli are presented in simulated form such as photographs or color slides. The most prominent pioneering work was performed by Elwood Shafer and his associates in the United States, who developed a "Landscape Preference Model" for quantifying and predicting public preferences by means of measuring formal aspects of photographs.⁵

Allen Carlson has taken Shafer and his coworkers to task not only for their obsession with the idea of quantifying aesthetic value but also for their exclusive reliance on photographs, which is typical for what Carlson calls the "scenic cult" or the "landscape cult."⁶ This cult encourages perceiving and appreciating the natural environment as if it were a landscape painting, that is, as a certain kind of scene observed from a specific viewpoint. It requires us to view the environment as if it were a static representation which is essentially two dimensional. "It requires the reduction of the environment to a scene or view. But what must be kept in mind is that the environment is not a scene, not a representation, not static, and not two dimensional."⁷

Nature Versus Art

Carlson blames mainstream empirical aesthetics for obscuring the differences between the natural environment and works of art. As Hepburn has already argued, the aesthetic appreciation of nature differs in at least three crucial ways from the appreciation of artworks.⁸

First, the degree to which the spectator is involved in the natural aesthetic situation is usually greater than in art appreciation. The

spectator of a landscape is surrounded by and immersed in that landscape in a way in which the spectator of a landscape painting is not in that painting. The natural environment impinges upon a broader range of senses than is commonly the case with artworks. Movements in the natural environment (of wind and water, for instance) and the spectator's movements—Hepburn mentions the movement of a glider-pilot—may have an important impact on aesthetic experience: The dichotomy between subject and object collapses and the spectator also becomes actor. In Hepburn's own words: "We have here not only a mutual involvement of spectator and object, but also a reflexive effect by which the spectator experiences *himself* in an unusual and vivid way."⁹

Second, traditional artworks are "framed" in a way that natural objects and landscapes are not. Hepburn uses the notion of "frame" not only in the literal sense of the physical boundaries of pictures but in a much broader sense—as the totality of devices employed in different arts to set art objects apart from natural objects and from artificial objects without aesthetic interest. The natural world, in contrast, is "frameless." This may seem like a disadvantage because the absence of frames precludes the recognition of the formal completeness and stability characteristic of art objects; it makes natural objects more indeterminate and unpredictable. But, on the other hand, this makes room for perceptual surprises and a sense of adventurous openness, and challenges the appreciator of a natural environment to come up with his or her own "framing."

Lastly, unlike works of art, the meaning of natural environments is not determined by a designer and a design. There are no guides to interpretation built in by some creator. But again this lack of artistic intent can enhance aesthetic experience and offer scope for the exercise of creativity and for imaginative play.

Hepburn argues that it is important to recognize these differences between art objects and natural objects and the types of aesthetic experience they provide:

Supposing that a person's aesthetic education fails to reckon with these differences, supposing it instils in him the attitudes, the tactics of approach, the expectations proper to the appreciation of artworks only, such a person will either pay very little aesthetic heed to natural objects or else will heed them in the wrong way. He will look—and of course look in vain—for what can be found and enjoyed only in art. Furthermore, one cannot

be at all certain that he will seriously ask himself whether there might be other tactics more proper and more fruitful for the aesthetic appreciation of nature.¹⁰

Such failure will have negative ramifications for the protection of the environment because "a sound natural aesthetics is crucial to sound conservation policy and management."¹¹

Outline of This Volume

By stressing the difference between an aesthetic appreciation of nature and an appreciation of artworks, philosophical aesthetics has distanced itself self-confidently from its empirical counterpart in environmental aesthetics that still seems to overlook this crucial difference. In the first decade of this century, this emancipation from empirical aesthetics was followed by a gradual expansion of the scope of the field of environmental aesthetics from natural environments to the mixed or modified environments of gardens, environmental and land art, and everyday environments, including built environments.¹² With this broadening, environmental aesthetics has finally been coming of age, reminding us of the heydays of philosophical aesthetics in the eighteenth century when natural beauty was the paradigm object of aesthetic experience and judgment.

Coming of Age

The volume's first part sketches this coming of age of environmental aesthetics. It is kicked off by Allen Carlson, who provides a historical backdrop for this volume by outlining "Ten Steps in the Development of Western Environmental Aesthetics," briefly describing some of the main contributions to the field that have been made at each stage. The chapter begins with Ronald Hepburn's seminal 1966 essay "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty" and ends with what Carlson calls the "Coming of Age" of environmental aesthetics, which is marked by the proliferation of new monographs, anthologies, reference volume entries, and introductory textbooks that have been published in the field since the turn of the century. He then adds a coda concerning environmental aesthetics beyond the West.

Next, Yuriko Saito discusses some important "Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics." Her chapter starts where Carlson's

chapter ends: the broadening of environmental aesthetics' scope from natural environments to mixed environments such as gardens, agricultural landscapes, urban environments, and its further expansion to include what Saito has called "everyday aesthetics" (i.e., all those ingredients that constitute our spatial environments, namely artefacts, human activities, and social relationships). At the end of her chapter, Saito also considers Carlson's very last (eleventh) step that goes beyond Western environmental aesthetics, and argues that many non-Western traditions such as Taoism and Japanese aesthetics provide rich insight into environmental aesthetic issues. Learning from their often time-honored thoughts and practices may very well enrich the environmental aesthetics discourse.

Finally, in his chapter "European and American Approaches to Environmental Aesthetics," Jonathan Maskit advocates yet another (twelfth) step—we should not only encourage a dialogue between Western and Eastern perspectives on environmental aesthetics but also engage in a dialogue between New World and Old World perspectives.¹³ Maskit challenges the "standard view" that the most important division in contemporary aesthetics is that between cognitivists (those who believe that concepts, usually scientific concepts, are essential for the aesthetic appreciation of nature) and noncognitivists (those who do not so believe). If we confront New World with Old World perspectives, an alternative distinction comes to the fore—that between universalism and cultural historicism. Universalism, the dominant approach of the field, generally holds that culture and history are—ultimately—unimportant when trying to figure out how people should appreciate nature aesthetically. Cultural historicism, by contrast, holds a pluralist or relativist position and believes that one's culture and history are crucial to working out one's environmental aesthetic, and rejects the universalist idea of there being only one correct way to appreciate an environment appropriately.

Rethinking Relationships

The widening of scope that characterized the coming of age of environmental aesthetics involves a continual rethinking of relationships, which is the subject of the volume's second part. This part opens with a chapter by Arnold Berleant, who is known for his "aesthetics of engagement" that stands in sharp contrast to the traditional contemplative model, which isolates aesthetic objects from

the rest of life and requires an attitude of disinterestedness.¹⁴ In "The Cultural Aesthetics of Environment," Berleant attempts to reconcile the need for cooperative environmental action in the face of environmental degradation and destruction with the existence of cultural and historic differences. In his 2005 book *Aesthetics and Environment*, Berleant tries to narrow the gap between universalism and relativism (the topic of Maskit's chapter) by introducing the notion of "generality," suggesting a degree of extent and allowing variability. In this volume, he argues that an ecological perspective can narrow the gap between the traditional Western view of the environment as separate and independent from humans, and thus as an object of control and manipulation, and the view of many Eastern cultures of living in harmony with nature.

While Berleant's chapter is about the relationship between universalism and cultural-historicism, and between Western and non-Western approaches, in Dennis Dumas' "Towards an Aesthetics of Respect" the focus is on the relationship between environmental ethics and environmental aesthetics, two philosophical disciplines that emerged at about the same time.¹⁵

Dumas turns to Kant's third critique—the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*—to obtain an aesthetics of respect for nature. Strictly speaking, the one and only object of our respect ("Achtung") is the moral law. Respect means the awareness of the free and voluntary subordination of our will to the moral law. According to Kant, respect for a person is, in fact, only respect for the law. In this way, Kant extends the notion of respect to humans. Dumas examines another extension of this notion, an extension of the second degree, from respect for humanity to respect for the aesthetic value of natural environments. Along these lines, Dumas arrives at an indirect duty of environmental protection which avoids the pitfalls and problems of non-anthropocentrism that proclaims direct ethical respect for nature.

In "From Theoretical to Applied Environmental Aesthetics," Yrjö Sepänmaa discusses yet another interrelationship, that between the theory and practice of environmental aesthetics. After reviewing the historical development of the field, Sepänmaa suggests that its future lies in moving outside the academy through a new kind of professional aesthetic activity and through engagement with the public. Environmental aestheticians should combine or complement their role as analysts with the role of guides, acting as experts in beauty in cooperation with researchers from other disciplines,

practical workers, policymakers, and the wider public. The need for a close cooperation between various parties as a consequence of the transition from theoretical to applied environmental aesthetics poses intricate problems of communication across boundaries between different and sometimes divergent disciplines and audiences. As an important way to tackle these problems, Sepänmaa points to a series of seven prestigious international congresses on environmental aesthetics that took place in Finland from 1994 to 2009 under his direction. This series has been a major force in the unification of the discipline, in crossing borders between the natural sciences and the humanities, in finding a common language for exchanging information and ideas across boundaries, and in linking activities of players from different fields (see also Carlson in this volume).

Nature, Art, and the Power of Imagination

The third part is devoted to yet another relationship that needs rethinking, the relationship between nature and art. In "Environmental Art and Ecological Citizenship," Jason B. Simus discusses and dismisses the criticism put forward by Allen Carlson that some, if not most, environmental artworks constitute an "aesthetic affront to nature."¹⁶ Carlson claims that whether an environmental artwork constitutes an affront depends only on aesthetic qualities apart from any relationship to its social, moral, and ecological qualities. Simus rejects his claim and argues that the aesthetic qualities of a work should not be divorced from these other qualities; instead we should aim at a comprehensive evaluation that takes all the work's qualities into consideration when the question is whether an environmental artwork is an affront. Simus also criticizes Carlson's idea that real nature is pristine, untouched by humans, as based on an outdated ecological theory. If humans are not seen as part of nature but apart from nature, environmental artworks are almost by definition an affront to nature. Simus' central thesis is that environmental artworks have the same democratic potential as restoration projects if participation in their creation, appreciation, and criticism encourages deliberation about aesthetic, social, moral, ecological, and all other community-regarding values.

In "Can Only Art Save Us Now?," David Wood discusses the well-known problem that little has been done until now to address global environmental change, especially climate change, that threatens life

as we know it. We humans are shortsighted, unwilling to act in our long-term interest. Reason alone will not inspire us to act in the interest of future generations; we also need the power of imagination to overcome our indifference and indolence. If our inability to act responsibly is indeed a failure of the imagination, art might be an eminent resource to steer us in the right direction. Hence Wood's question: Can only art save us now? Can art bridge the imagination gap, to make our potentially catastrophic future vividly plausible, and to open up space for alternative, less "toxic," forms of living and dwelling? To answer this question, Wood turns to Heidegger, and especially to his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," drafted between 1935 and 1937. Following in the footsteps of Heidegger, Wood considers art as an event of disclosure or uncovering that might open onto modes of dwelling that are less destructive than the current ones. Art can make us aware of our present suboptimal habits and patterns of behavior that are ruining the earth; it can also encourage us to transform or displace them by habits and patterns that are necessary to "save the earth."

Irene Klaver takes the baton from Wood in exploring the power of imagination for the environment. In "Landscapes of the Environmental Imagination: Ranging from NASA and Cuyahoga Images to Kiefer and O'Keeffe Paintings," Klaver sketches the rise of what she calls "environmental imagination," with special attention to the work of two modern painters, Georgia O'Keeffe and Anselm Kiefer. Klaver sketches a conceptual framework of the environmental imagination through the work of philosophers and social theorists, such as Benedict Anderson, Edward Said, Arjun Appadurai, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who all developed a notion of the imagination beyond the mental faculties of the individual. She shows how an unexpected commonality emerges from the perspective of an environmental imagination between two radically different painters—Georgia O'Keeffe and Anselm Kiefer.

Wind Farms, Shopping Malls, and Wild Animals

The last part of the volume is illustrative of Yrjö Sepänmaa's claim about the new relation between theory and practice, typified by the emergence of practical applications from theoretical studies and the use of concrete examples and case studies. In "Beauty or Bane: Advancing an Aesthetic Appreciation for Wind Turbine Farms," Tyson-Lord Gray discusses the landscape effects of

windfarms. Gray begins his chapter by looking at declining wind turbine sales during the years 2007–2010. In an attempt to locate a reason for this decline, he evaluates two claims: (1) that windfarms reduce property value and (2) that windfarms ruin the beauty of nature. For the first claim, he looks at three studies conducted on residential property sales located near wind farms. For the second claim, he engages in a comparison of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which defends purely emotional aesthetic evaluations, and John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, which provides an understanding that views beauty as an integration of both emotional and cognitive judgments. According to Gray, Dewey's aesthetic can help to push the conversation beyond the purely emotional response of many windfarm opponents.

In "Thinking Like a Mall," Steven Vogel examines the history of the City Center Mall (1989–2009) in Columbus, Ohio, asking whether the same sorts of consideration that led Aldo Leopold to call for humans to "think like a mountain" might suggest that we should also learn to think like a mall. The moral considerability of natural entities such as mountains is often claimed to derive from their autonomy or independence from human beings, where autonomy is understood either narrowly in terms of a teleology internal to the entities that human action might modify or frustrate, or more broadly in terms of a liability to forces that operate beyond human control. But Vogel claims malls, too, exhibit "autonomy" in both those senses, as do all humanly built structures. The commercial failure of City Center itself shows this, revealing it to have been subject to an ecology of commerce that escaped human understanding and prediction. Human artifacts, Vogel concludes, are as marked by "otherness" from humans as so-called natural objects are; we cannot "identify" with our artifacts, we do not "see ourselves reflected" in them, they do not exist on the other side of an ontological divide from natural entities, and so forth. We live in one world, not two; if we are to let mountains be, we should let malls be as well.

In "Aesthetic Value and Wild Animals," Emily Brady discusses a subject long neglected in environmental aesthetics. Animals are commonly featured in our aesthetic experience, from our interactions with companion animals to the attention given to iconic species and "charismatic" megafauna. Mammals, birds, insects, and marine life are part of our everyday and not-so-everyday lives, in the flesh and featuring as subjects in the arts and media. Given the

significance of animals in these domains, it is surprising how neglected they are in debates in environmental aesthetics. On what grounds do we ascribe aesthetic value to wild animals? Recently, Glenn Parsons has argued that this value is grounded in the “fitness” of animals in relation to their form, behavior, and traits.¹⁷ Brady contends that Parsons’ “functional beauty” approach overlooks the important role played by expressive qualities in our aesthetic experience of animals. Drawing on expressive theories of music and discussions of expressive qualities in nature, Brady examines the distinctive character and basis of these qualities in sentient nonhuman creatures. She then addresses potential moral problems and objections, in particular, how aesthetic appreciation of expressive qualities is related to or distinct from sentimental, trivial, and anthropomorphic responses to wild animals.

This volume clearly shows that the field of philosophical environmental aesthetics has reached maturity and at the same time has diversified considerably over the past few decades. Environmental aesthetics today harbors a wide range of perspectives and crosses several commonly recognized divides, notably between analytic and continental philosophical traditions, Eastern and Western cultural worldviews, universalizing and historicizing understandings of aesthetic experience, aesthetics and ethics, and theoretical and practical concerns. This volume sets out to show how these different approaches and perspectives can be brought into conversation with one another, lending environmental aesthetics a degree of coherence, while reinforcing the diversity of positions that it displays.