

ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS

Interest in environmental aesthetics is relatively recent. It goes back only twenty or thirty years, although people have sung about the beauties of nature since ancient times. Environmental aesthetics is something different from appreciating nature, however, although one of the things it tries to understand is what the appreciation of nature is and how, if at all, it differs from appreciating art. In the brief time I have, I should like to tell you something about this field.

Although it has been philosophers who have tended to give environmental aesthetics the most sustained attention, the area has attracted scholars from many disciplines, including art history, architecture, city and regional planning, and psychology. These fields bring different perspectives to bear on our understanding of environment, for environment is a prime example of a field of study that cannot be adequately understood from a single vantage point, not unlike environment, itself. Environmental aesthetics, moreover, bears on the creative arts, as well. Not only has the environment become the locus and subject matter for many artists in recent years, but how we grasp environment has implications for the practice of a number of different arts. Further, it has theoretical significance for our understanding of the more traditional arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. And finally, environmental aesthetics identifies important values in ecological thinking, in general, values that are often overlooked.

Let me begin by saying something about what we understand by aesthetics and how we can interpret the idea of environment. Then I shall talk about how environmental aesthetics has emerged both as an interest for artists and as a subject of aesthetic inquiry.

I. Changing art and changing aesthetics

Aesthetics of the branch of philosophy that is concerned with understanding the arts and with beauty in nature. Traditional aesthetics has shaped our understanding of the so-called fine arts, and those arts have seemed to confirm the claims of that theory. Central among these claims are the assertions that art is a unique and special cultural institution, that it is self-sufficient and autonomous, that it requires a special mode of attention called disinterested contemplation, and that the art object must be isolated from its cultural context and from any utilitarian purposes to be properly appreciated. These claims seem admirably suited to the fine arts, and they appear to characterize the way we approach painting, sculpture, music, theater, dance, and literature. Museums, theaters, concert halls, and libraries all provide special places for their enjoyment, places where we step outside the normal run of experience and adopt an attitude of attending to those arts for their own sake alone. Aesthetics and the arts thus seem to complement each other: Aesthetic theory guides our appreciation of the arts, while the fine arts exemplify the precepts of aesthetics.

Yet we stand at the end of a century of enormous changes in the arts, changes that continue without rest and that are difficult to accommodate. We know well how, since early in this century, artists have been challenging conventions, using uncustomary materials and techniques, and breaking out of traditional patterns of work, objects, and audience. How can we grasp these changes, both with our eyes and with our minds? This is where aesthetics, as the theory of the arts, should help us.

Unfortunately, traditional aesthetic theory is remarkably inflexible here, insisting that these developments in the arts be forced into conformity with its principles. Yet this richness in the range of the arts is important for aesthetic theory. It brings us back to experience, in all its specificity, its unevenness, and its ephemerality. The expansion of art leads us beyond the widened and enriched range of objects conventionally regarded as art to things and situations that can not be easily circumscribed and cataloged. Video art and the use of electronic media have generated a domain of virtual reality which art has entered and worked in. Environmental artists have revised and reshaped portions of the earth's surface (Christo, Smithson). And we have stepped outside the arts, themselves, into our environment and have discovered its aesthetic character.

With the changing, expanding arts and the enlargement of aesthetic appreciation, we need to re-think the conventional explanations that aesthetics has offered. Such developments lead us far beyond distinct and separate objects and into situations in which the appreciator works along with the artist, sometimes *becomes* the artist, all joining in an aesthetic context of which they become constituent parts. Art, moreover, is no longer content with its special venues and discrete forms but intrudes on building walls, subway stations, and city streets. Our appreciation of art has also broken out of conventional patterns and perceptual modalities. We engage actively with much of our art, at times entering into its space, as in environmental sculpture and environments, contributing to its process, as in interactive theater, bringing it into our work environments and, in general, integrating artistic and aesthetic activities

into our ongoing social life. In one way or another, art has become environmental, and aesthetics must develop ideas that can encompass these developments. What we need is a theoretical account that describes and explains how we actively participate in the realm of art. I call such a theory the aesthetics of engagement and have developed this in some detail elsewhere.ⁱ

II. An enlarged sense of environment

As our conception of art has enlarged, so too has our understanding of environment. What is environment? The usual answer that it is our natural surroundings obviously will not do, for this overlooks the fact that most people's lives are far removed from any kind of natural setting, yet everyone is involved with environment. Indeed, such a setting is even difficult to identify, since nature, in the sense of a landscape unaffected by human agency, has long since disappeared in nearly every region of the industrialized world.ⁱⁱ

Yet the question of what environment denotes merely begins the process. For even if we expand the concept to encompass the reshaped landscapes and built structures in which an increasing proportion of the world's population now lives, that does not settle the question. To think of environment in the usual sense as surroundings suggests that it lies outside the person, a container within which people pursue their private purposes. Environmental researchers seem to assume that there is some thing, "the environment," and that this environment is constituted by our physical surroundings. Philosophers tend to agree, sometimes including the cultural and spiritual setting.

Although custom and etymology may lead us to think of environment as surroundings, the idea remains complex and elusive.ⁱⁱⁱ It may already be apparent that I do not ordinarily speak of "the" environment. While this is the usual locution, it embodies a hidden meaning that is the source of much of our difficulty. For "the" environment objectifies environment; it turns it into an entity which we can think of and deal with as if it were outside and independent of ourselves.^{iv} In The Beauty of Environment, a comprehensive and systematic inquiry into environmental aesthetics, Yrjö Sepänmaa accepts the conventional usage. Although his sensitive discussion of the concept of environment retains its association with the external world of an observer, he expands its scope to include the cultural environment and the constructed environment, in addition to the natural one. See The Beauty of Environment (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1986), p.17. Where, however, can we locate "the" environment? Where is "outside" in this case? Is it the landscape that surrounds me where I stand? Is it the world beyond my window? Outside the walls of my room and house? On the other side of the clothes I wear? Is environment the air I breathe? The food I eat?

Yet the food metabolizes to become my body, the air swells my lungs and enters my bloodstream, my clothes are not only the outermost layer of my skin but complete and identify my style, my personality, my sense of self. My room, apartment, or home defines my personal space and world. And the landscape in which I move as I walk, drive, or fly is my world, as well, ordered by my understanding, defined by my movements, and molding my muscles, my reflexes, my experience, my consciousness at the same time as I attempt to impose my will over it. Indeed, many of us spend much of our lives in the electronic space of television and computer networks. "The" environment, one of the last survivors of the mind-body dualism, a place beyond which we think to contemplate from a distance, dissolves. "The" environment dissolves into a complex network of relationships, connections, and continuities of those physical, social, and cultural conditions that circumscribe my actions, my responses, my awareness, and that give shape and content to the very life that is mine. For there is no outside world. There is no

ⁱ See, in particular, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

ⁱⁱ Most wilderness areas are not primeval nature but regions that reflect the earlier and ongoing consequences of human action in the form of land clearing, erosion, strip mining, reforestation, acid rain, modifications of the surface of the land and in the distribution of water, alterations of climate induced by the vast expanses of paved surfaces in urbanized areas, introduced species of flora and fauna, and now the dessication of the ozone layer, from whose consequences in global warming and increased solar radiation no area of the planet is immune.

ⁱⁱⁱ See the discussion of the definition of 'environment' in *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp.81, 224.

^{iv} This may offer some explanation of human depredations on environment, for exploitative practices toward natural resources, and for turning the edges of our streets and highways into linear refuse dumps.

outside. Nor is there an inner sanctum in which I can take refuge from inimical external forces. The perceiver (mind) is an aspect of the perceived (body) and, in like manner, person and environment are continuous.

Thus both aesthetics and environment must be thought of in a new, expanded sense. An aesthetics of engagement rather than contemplation also suits our understanding of environment as continuous with us, its inhabitants. In both cases, art and environment, we can no longer stand apart but join in as active participants.

III. Experiencing Environment

Experiencing environment, therefore, is not a matter of looking at an external landscape. In fact, it is not just a matter of looking at all. Sometimes writers attempt to associate environment with our physical surroundings and landscape with our visual perception of a scene and the ideas and attitudes through which we interpret it.^v Yet considering human beings apart from their environment is both philosophically unfounded and scientifically false, and it leads to disastrous practical consequences. Similarly, our understanding of experience has expanded greatly to involve all the bodily senses and not just the eye. We now recognize that the conscious body does not observe the world contemplatively but participates actively in the experiential process.^{vi}

This bears intimately on environmental aesthetics, for the appreciation of perceptual values inherent in environment involves physical engagement. Environmental appreciation is not just looking approvingly at lovely scenery but it is driving down a winding country road, tramping along a hiking trail, paddling the course of a stream, and, in all such activities, being acutely attentive to the sounds, the smells, the feel of wind and sun, the nuances of color, shape, and pattern. It is found, too, in the deep awareness, so rare in the contemporary world, of living in a house and place to which we belong intimately both in living experience and in memory. And it arises in the kinesthetic sense of the masses and spaces that incorporate us. Incorporate is a good word here, for it means literally to bring our bodies in, and this engagement in a whole is what the aesthetic experience of environment involves.

At the same time and as part of this embodied experience, we carry our knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes with us, for these participate in the process of experience and enable us to structure and interpret it. Such influences of thought and attitude also point up a crucial fact about aesthetic experience, of both art and of environment. It is that aesthetic valuation is not a purely personal experience, "subjective," as it is often mistakenly called, but a social one. In engaging aesthetically with environment as with art, the knowledge, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes we have are largely social, cultural, and historical in origin. These direct our attention, open or close us to what is happening, and prepare or impede our participation. Here as elsewhere, the personal is infused with the social. We are not pure sense perceivers, and experience is not solely sensation. Social forms and cultural patterns equip us with the means for ordering and grasping the occasions in which we are involved through myths, theories, and other explanations. In experiencing environment aesthetically, therefore, we are engaged in a social activity, not a purely personal one, and frequently on a public occasion. Our sociality is inherent in our aesthetic experience, whether of art or of environment.

Environment--and landscape with it--is, then, not just our physical surroundings, not only our perception of this setting, our environmental ideas and activities, or the order that society and culture give them, but all of these together. An integral whole, environment is an interrelated and interdependent union of people and place, together with their reciprocal processes. Similarly, understanding environment is not merely an additive process, a matter of putting our knowledge of separate disciplines together to arrive at a general conception, like the string of disconnected stores and businesses that constitute the ubiquitous commercial strip. Rather it requires us to recognize

^v D. W. Meinig, ed., The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 3.

^{vi} The distinction between environment and landscape, then, must be drawn differently to mirror this new understanding. If environment is falsely regarded as objective, and if it joins landscape in being infused with the beliefs and attitudes of those who are part of it, what then is the difference between the two? Perhaps we can say that environment is the more general term, embracing the many factors, including the human ones, that combine to form the conditions of life. Landscape, reflecting the experience of an immediate location, is more particular. It is an individual environment, its peculiar features embodying in a distinctive way the factors that constitute any environment and emphasizing the human presence as the perceptual activator of that environment. We can express this somewhat differently by saying that landscape is a lived environment. Environment is used here in this more general sense, but in discussing a region or in considering a specific location, it may be useful to particularize it by speaking of it as a landscape or as the environment or this environment.

how the various environmental disciplines interpenetrate and inform each other, resembling the way in which sciences such as systems engineering and biological ecology pursue a holistic model. But environment is more inclusive yet, which is why we cannot break it down into elements in order to discover its aesthetic ingredient. More than any other study, the aesthetics of environment emerges as a dimension of the entire complex of objects, people, and their activities. That is why we cannot discover the aesthetic value of a landscape from a cultural resources survey of historic buildings or from an accumulation of particular amenities, such as parks or unusual natural features. Environment is a name for a complex, integrated whole, and its aesthetic is a dimension of that whole.

What is this qualitative experience of environment? It includes more than an acute sensitivity to the delights of landscape. As noise is more insistent than music, commercial signs than paintings, or a factory than a grove of trees, the dominant environmental experience does not always assume a positive form. The aesthetics of environment must also recognize the experience of landscapes that offend us in various ways: by destroying the identity and affection of place, by disrupting architectural coherence, by imposing sounds and smells that may injure as well as repel, by making our living environment hostile and even uninhabitable. Part of this criticism is aesthetic, an offense to our perceptual sensibilities and an immediate encounter with negative value. Environmental experience and criticism are the focal point of this book, and I shall have much to say about them as we proceed.

IV. Aesthetics in the Landscape

The aesthetic values of environment profoundly affect nations and cultures, as well as individuals. National groups commonly possess a mystique about their land, and this may be distorted into a possessive claim over a geographical region. Yet part of that mystique is an affection for their landscape and its beauty, and this is more innocent. Although its aesthetic values may be destroyed, they cannot be possessed. It is difficult to collect landscapes as we collect paintings, and so we must be content to visit scenic places, collecting, if you will, experiences of landscape. Some people presume to possess land, but few can presume to possess a landscape. Possession, in landscape as in love, is a manifestation of power, not appreciation. Both sacrifice intrinsic, aesthetic value to an outside purpose much less reputable.

Furthermore, associations with a cultural landscape are more far-reaching than such icons as the Swiss Alps, Mount Fuji, the Yangtze Gorge, or the Grand Canyon. The United States has preserved many of its natural wonders in a fine national park system, but these temples of nature are rarely a part of the ordinary landscape of daily life. Visiting them usually requires a long journey to unfamiliar regions. For most people, the lived, the living landscape is the commonplace setting of everyday life. And how we engage with the prosaic landscapes of home, work, local travel, and recreation is an important measure of the quality of our lives. How we engage aesthetically with our landscape is a measure of the intrinsic value of our experience.

This is aesthetics in practice, and it is reflected in the landscapes of different cultural traditions. It is impossible to visit Greece, Italy or France without noticing the distinctive character each nationality bequeaths to the landscape. Temples that mark promontories and high places and the concept of the acropolis were integral parts of classical Greek culture.^{vii} The Italian genius for architecture is an inseparable part of a larger concept of human settlement in the landscape, whether on the watery margins of Venice or in the hill towns rising amid their rocky setting. In France, the fertile landscape of the cultivated garden found expression in both the lavish formal eighteenth century gardens and the nineteenth century redesign of Paris. In England during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the improved natural landscape of the great estate parks designed by William Kent, Humphrey Repton, and Lancelot ("Capability") Brown, influenced by the naturalistic gardens of seventeenth-century China, became conscious works of art. In all these cases, the human transformations of the landscape were guided by aesthetic concerns. Each of these traditions and practices influenced its successors, and each had an effect on how landscapes in the United States were seen, painted, and designed.

Thus the cultural landscape becomes a repository over time of the values that each generation attaches to a specific region. In a long-settled area, a respect for natural forms may be shown by returning small portions of the area to wilderness, but this is a limited, symbolic gesture that does not respond to the broader concerns of the settled region. Parks, which domesticate nature and make it accessible, signify a valued landscape in a different way.

^{vii} Vincent Scully, The Earth, the Temple and the Gods (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 186-

These traditions are shared with other Northeastern and Midwestern urban places and have nothing in common with the wilderness emphasis of federal land management in the arid west.

It is important to remember that these culturally transformed landscapes are of no less value than wilderness areas and are equally worth preserving. As part of the tradition that views nature as a garden, urban parks seem to contradict the modern sensibility toward wilderness. They may be substantially modified by the activities and uses of many generations, making them cultural as well as natural landscapes. The botanical garden had its origins in the nineteenth century's interest in the scientific classification of plant and animal forms, and identifying such historical values enriches appreciation. Gardens, parks, and arboretums recall an older set of landscape values. Christopher Tunnard reminds us that science is not hostile to aesthetic responses and that the separation of city from nature found in the elevation of wilderness over garden is a modern concept.^{viii}

The aesthetic study of a particular environment may draw from the geomorphological and historical information we have of it and from our knowledge of the cultural traditions that helped shape it, yet it is important to relate this information to perceptual experience. It is impossible to know a landscape fully by reading accounts of a region or perusing a map. Nor can we obtain such knowledge by looking at photographs, film clips, or paintings. Grasping a landscape aesthetically through such indirect means depends on the skill of the author, the artist, and the viewer or reader, and it is always difficult and partial. One contribution that the aesthetic makes to the cognition of landscape lies in recognizing the human contribution to the experience as well as to the knowledge of it. Environment does not stand separate and apart to be studied and known impartially and objectively. A landscape is like a suit of clothes, empty and meaningless apart from its wearer. Without a human presence, it possesses only possibilities. The human contribution to landscape produces knowledge by being, not only by thinking; it provides an understanding gained through action, not contemplation. Furthermore, apprehending the aesthetic value of landscape in this way not only offers cognitive gratification; it also provides a means of recognizing that value in experience and may arouse an incentive to promote it. The aesthetic experience of environment, whether formalized in traditional practices or developed into guiding principles, has profound practical import.

V. Appreciating environment

It might seem theoretically pure and etymologically straightforward to identify aesthetics with surface qualities. After all, tradition tells us, this is what our senses bring us: a direct grasp of the sights and sounds of the world, an immediate apprehension of its tastes and smells, the textures and resistance of things. There is a certain candor in locating *aisthesis* in the direct perception of the senses. This, however, opens the question; it does not answer it. For we must continue with the important task of exploring that sensory world, the phenomenal realm so critical for Kant, so central to the physical sciences, so rich a source of cues and other information in daily life.

The convenient handful of senses that that metaphorical extra, common sense, distinguishes is often grouped into two separate categories, the distance receptors and the contact receptors. The visual sense allows us to discern light, color, shape, pattern, movement, and distance, with its corresponding abstraction, space. Through hearing we grasp sounds as noise or pitch, the latter qualified by timbre, order, sequence, rhythm and other patterns. Philosophic custom since Plato's *Hippias Major* has identified sight and hearing as the aesthetic senses, since they allow a kind of unperturbed reflection so long associated with ideal beauty.

It is necessary to overcome established tradition to introduce the other senses into aesthetic perception, for relying on the close involvement of the body disrupts the lofty contemplation traditionally thought essential for aesthetic pleasure.^{ix} As we shall see later, this is an unfortunate division of the senses, especially for the perception of environment, from which we can never distance ourselves. For the contact receptors are part of the human sensorium and are actively involved in environmental experience. The olfactory sense is intimately present in our awareness of place and time. Even the sense of taste can contribute to that consciousness, as Proust's madeleine eloquently testifies. Tactile experience, moreover, is not univocal, as we so often think. It belongs to the haptic sensory system, which encompasses both tactual and subcutaneous perception of surface texture, contour, pressure,

^{viii} Christopher Tunnard, *A World with a View: An Inquiry into the Nature of Scenic Values* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

^{ix} This is the subject of my paper, "The Sensuous and the Sensual in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XXIII, 2 (Winter 1964), 185-192. Reprinted in *Philosophical Essays on Curriculum*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1969), ed. R. S. Guttchen and B. Bandman, pp. 306-317.

temperature, humidity, pain, and visceral sensation. It also includes other sensory channels, usually overlooked or confounded with touch, that are different in important respects. The kinesthetic sense involves muscular awareness and skeletal or joint sensation through which we perceive position and solidity through the degrees of resistance of surfaces: hard, soft, sharp, blunt, firm, yielding. And we grasp body movement indirectly through the vestibular system: the awareness of climbing and descending, turning and twisting, obstruction and free passage.^x

Equally important with discriminating the sensory range of environmental perception is the recognition of synaesthesia, one of whose meanings is the fusion of the sense modalities. For these different perceptual courses are distinguishable only on reflection, in analysis, and under experimental conditions, not in experience. More forcefully than in any other situation, environmental perception engages the entire, functionally interactive human sensorium. We become part of environment through the interpenetration of body and place.

Important as the sensory domain is for environmental perception, serious problems result from identifying it with surface qualities. There are both empirical problems and philosophic ones. The first follow from regarding environmental experience as an encounter with the surface of the world, its skin, so to speak, an encounter in which we receive sensory input from external phenomena. While phenomenalism has been an important concept, we rarely if ever have pure sensation. Psychological research in this century has demonstrated the formative contributions of physiological and social factors in sense perception. The large body of work by Gestalt, physiological, transactional, and social psychologists has forced the conclusion that while the philosophic concepts of sense data or pure sensation have been historically important, they are now cognitively obsolete. Perception is not passive but an active, reciprocal engagement with environment. Moreover, not only is there a physiological contribution in perception but an individual's previous history exercises a powerful influence in the various forms of stimulus-response and operant conditioning. Social experience and cultural factors also influence experience through the perceptual habits, belief systems, styles of living, and traditions of behavior and judgment that we acquire. As an account of environmental perception, then, surface qualities are unavoidably superficial. Environmental perception must move beyond the sensory surface of the world these divisions, experientially as well as conceptually, and toward a sense of the continuities that join integrated human persons with their natural and cultural condition. Aesthetic perception offers direct awareness of the engagement that attains a harmonized mode of human being, and in environmental experience it is most concrete and immediate.

'Perception' is a difficult term. We not only see our living world; we move with it, we act upon and in response to it. We grasp places not just through color, texture, and shape, but with the breath, by smell, with our skin, through our muscular action and skeletal position, in the sounds of wind, water, and traffic. Those major dimensions of environment--space, mass, volume, and depth--are encountered not primarily by the eye but with the body in our movements and actions. Powerful as the sensory dimension is in perception, it alone does not constitute environmental experience. Other factors than those directly sensed join to shape and bend our experience. For sensation is not just sensory and not only physiological; it fuses with cultural influences. This is, in fact, the only way a cultural organism can experience. The separation of sensation and meaning is another of those subtle divisions that actual experience does not support, for as social beings we perceive through the modalities of our culture.^{xi} The perception of snow, of rain, of distance, of weight, of confusion and order is discriminated and identified according to the paradigms and categories embedded in cultural practices, never by retinal or tactile stimulation, alone. The same can be said about noise level, the qualities of smell and taste, and the level of light.

The perceptual world in which we move is wide and rich. Thoroughly and inseparably sensory and cultural, it is a complex experiential environment. In addition to the sensory modalities we have been discussing, the multidimensional context of human experience includes such things as shapes and lines, the timbral and wave patterns of sound, light and shadow, pattern and texture, temperature, muscular tension, directional motion and lines

^x James J. Gibson, The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1966), p.97. Gibson identifies five perceptual systems: the basic orienting system (movement), the auditory system, the haptic system, the taste-smell system, and the visual system. "Information about the world can be obtained with any perceptual system alone or with any combination of perceptual systems working together." p.55. See Gibson's The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979). See also Harvey Richard Schiffman, Sensation and Perception, An Integrated Approach (New York: Wiley, 1976), pp.119-121.

^{xi} I use the term 'culture' here and throughout this book in its anthropological sense exclusively. While this meaning is itself much discussed, it is perhaps safe to say that culture refers to the meanings, ideas, values, ideals, customs, skills, and practical and fine arts that human beings learn as members of a given social group, past or present.

of force, volume and depth. And, of course, all perception occurs within the framework of the fundamental metaphysical dimensions of space, time, and movement.^{xii}

The human environment is, in the final account, a perceptual system and, as such, an order of experience. Grasped from an aesthetic standpoint, it has sensory richness, directness, and immediacy, together with cultural patterns and meanings that perception carries and these give environment its thick texture. Environment, then, is a complex idea, the more so when we consider it aesthetically. We have already rejected many of its common definitions: as an entity--"the" environment; as a container within which we carry on our activities; as our physical surroundings; as the world external to our thoughts, feelings, and desires. In place of these self-congratulatory concepts we begin to understand environment as the physical-cultural realm in which people engage in all the activities and responses that compose the weave of human life in its many historical and social patterns. When the aesthetic factor is recognized, perceptual directness, with its strong focus on immediacy and presence, becomes preeminent.

The idea of an aesthetic environment is a new concept that enlarges the meaning of environment. It calls attention to a dimension of experience that is always present but which, for cultural reasons, has been overlooked. I say "for cultural reasons" here because the deliberate quarantining of the aesthetic, its use merely as an overlay on the practical activities and products of Western commercial and industrial societies, is no universal practice. In fact, it is an aberrant exception to the way in which most other cultural traditions incorporate the aesthetic into social life. Much can be learned of cultural integration from the traditional civilizations of China and Japan, from the cultures of Bali and native America, from the various indigenous populations of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas. Vestiges of the aesthetic survive in the West in the rituals of religious worship, in fine dining, in gardening, and in outdoor activities not subverted by the telic obsession of competition, such as strolling, hiking, camping, recreational swimming, and canoeing.

We come to recognize, then, that aesthetic perception is never purely physical sensation and never discrete and timeless. It is always contextual, mediated by the variety of conditions and influences that shape all experience. And because we live as part of a cultural environment, our aesthetic perception and judgment are inevitably cultural. This is not just an abstract statement; it denotes the unending variety of cultural perception. Each society at every historical period has its distinctive manner of perceiving aesthetically. This, indeed, is what may be meant when we speak of knowing a different culture, acquiring its mind-set, its feel of the world. In the arts it provides the cultural adventure we find in reading world literature, engaging with exotic art objects, and viewing international cinema. It is one of the great incentives to travel. And since environment is cultural, any discussion of environmental aesthetics must, by that fact, involve what we may call a cultural aesthetic.^{xiii}

^{xii} A rich body of material on perceptual experience continues to come from the phenomenological and existential traditions, following the seminal work of Husserl, Sartre, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Schütz, and others, and developing such concepts as body space, life space, lived space, and lived time.

^{xiii} Geographers and anthropologists describe how different cultural groups develop distinctive ways of carrying on the many activities by which their lives proceed: food production, family organization, economic exchange, land use, ritual. They speak of the physical landscape that reflects these activities and that assumes distinctive patterns and shapes as a "cultural landscape." The concept of a cultural aesthetic is a correlative notion that emerges from the ideas about aesthetic perception we have been developing. A cultural aesthetic is the perceptual matrix that constitutes the distinctive environment of a society. It fuses physical features and human apprehension into a continuous experiential context that includes its characteristic built structures, the configuration of its landscape, its prevailing qualities of sensation and forms of apprehension. This matrix encompasses the distinctive patterns of color, sound, texture, light, movement (including the rate and the patterns of sensory change), smells, tastes, spaces (including distance), temporal sensibility, and size relationships to the human body. Together such factors determine the distinctive character of the environmental experience of a particular time and place.

A cultural aesthetic identifies how a people perceives its world. A knowledgeable observer can often identify an ethnic neighborhood by its "look," and an experienced traveler will delight in the distinctive character of a foreign place. What we sense here informally can become the basis for specific studies of cultural aesthetics, not just of particular places but of cultural experience. Moreover, once we identify the idea of a cultural aesthetic, we can not only study the aesthetics of individual cultures but determine whether patterns and types emerge. This is an ideal interdisciplinary inquiry, best accomplished through the cooperation of aesthetics with cultural geography, anthropology, and other related fields.

What, finally, is environmental aesthetics? As the aesthetics of poetry or painting is the study of the aesthetic character and value in these arts, so environmental aesthetics examines aesthetic experience and value in environment. Our understanding of the experience of aesthetic value in the arts forms the bases for the different verbal judgments that can be made there--critical, interpretive, philosophical. Similarly, environmental aesthetics requires a grasp of what environment is, of what environmental experience is, of its aesthetic dimension, and of the kind of value that develops there.

"It is something," Thoreau once wrote, "to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts."^{xiv} The aesthetic environment is everyone's medium, the art of environment, the art of human living. The perceptual world is the human world. Our capacities and limitations affect the possibilities and the boundaries of that world. This does not assign the character and limitations of human perception to the world at large but recognizes rather that they constitute the conditions and boundaries of the human world.^{xv} For the range of human sensory perception differs from and is often exceeded by other creatures: The auditory range of a dog or a bat extends far higher than our own; the breadth of vision of a flat fish spreads well beyond ours to nearly 360 degrees and the visual range of an owl or hawk stretches far past the human limit of darkness and distance; the somatic sensibility of an amoeba or an earthworm is more powerful and independent than our own.

Yet the human world is not barren, nor is it meager. Its possibilities are, indeed, far richer than the world we usually apprehend, blinded as we are by insensitivity and limited by the tunnel vision of obsessive purpose. We must enlarge our perceptual consciousness and expand our sensory acuteness, for as cultural animals we are not children of the immediate present, alone. Human perception blends memories, beliefs, and associations, and this range of meanings deepens experience. The essential problem here is to keep the meanings true to the directness of sensory awareness and not edit that awareness to fit our customary meanings.^{xvi}

To take the world fully, to employ the entire range of perception, is to magnify our experience, our human world, our lives. The goal, then, is an expanded but discriminating awareness as part of a totally engaged organic, social life. This requires alertness, intelligence, and active involvement in the full scope of experience. The aesthetic sense of environment is a central aspect of such a life.

II. Aesthetics of environment

It is becoming clear that identifying the aesthetic aspect can enlarge our sense of environment. But the converse is equally true: A rich grasp of environment can profoundly affect our understanding of aesthetics.^{xvii} Convention constricts the range of aesthetics here to natural beauty: a massive configuration of thunderheads, a vista of receding hills, the bend in the quiet flow of a woodland stream, an early spring wildflower. Yet in extending the range of nature to include every manner of thing, we at the same time equally extend the domain of aesthetics. For if an aesthetic aspect is descriptive before it is prescriptive, then a qualitative dimension of perception is everywhere possible. Just as art since the late nineteenth century has moved far beyond the pleasing and pretty to accept into its range all manner of things, from the ugly to the grotesque, the bizarre, and even the repulsive, so an

^{xiv} Henry David Thoreau, Walden (New York: Norton, 1966), p.61.

^{xv} This idea appears in various forms in philosophical naturalism, pragmatism, Marxist humanism, and existential phenomenology. Recently it has been applied to scientific inquiry as "the anthropic principle," the view that "our own existence acts as a selection effect when assessing the observed properties of the Universe." John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, The Anthropic Cosmological Principle (New York: Oxford, 1986), pp.2, 4.

^{xvi} This discussion must not be misunderstood to be making the anthropocentric claim that the human world is exclusive or that it is superior. Nor am I endorsing any form of epistemological or metaphysical idealism. I intend only to acknowledge what I consider to be the condition of all statement and all inquiry, that we can never exceed or stand independently of our human position. Claims to objectivity or epistemological realism are thus necessarily spurious.

^{xvii} The comments that follow anticipate Ch. 11, "Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm."

aesthetics of nature must also dissolve its protective borders and admit the world. There is an aesthetic aspect to our experience of every environment, then, the commercial strip as much as the bucolic landscape, the industrial landscape as well as the mountain lake. Like the inclusiveness of nature, this does not confer an automatic endorsement; it raises the greater responsibility of developing critical judgment by determining the aesthetic value of an environment against the success and fulfillment of that experience.

The significance of an aesthetics of environment thus becomes far greater, and at the same time its scope increases. No longer confined to the safe precincts of gardens and parks, the boundaries of the aesthetic must be redefined to encompass all of nature, city as well as countryside, factory as well as museum, desert wastes as well as glacier-fed fjords. The implications of this affect not only aesthetic theory but value theory in general, indeed, philosophy en tout. For enlarging the limits of aesthetics means not just admitting more kinds of objects into its purview; more penetrating consequences follow the extension of aesthetic awareness. If every thing has an aesthetic dimension, then so does every experience of every thing, since things stand for us only in so far as we experience them, and an aesthetic dimension is inherent in all experience. The aesthetic becomes, then, a universal category, not the universal category but the omnipresent concept of a pervasive feature of experience.

What are the dimensions of an aesthetic that includes environment? Environment, in the large sense, is not a domain separate and distinct from ourselves as human inhabitants. We are rather continuous with environment, an integral part of its processes. The usual tradition in aesthetics has difficulty with this, for it claims that appreciation requires a receptive, contemplative attitude. Such an attitude befits an observer, but nature admits of no such observer, for nothing can remain apart and uninvolved. Two fundamentally opposed alternatives seem possible here. The usual choice is to regard the aesthetics of environment as a kind of appreciative enjoyment distinctly different from art. The other is to treat the appreciation of nature and of art as essentially the same. The first allows us to retain the tradition in aesthetics unchanged; the second obliges us to abandon that tradition for an aesthetic that accommodates both art and nature on equal terms.^{xviii} This aesthetics of engagement, as I call it, leads to a restructuring of aesthetic theory, a revision especially congenial to environmental aesthetics, in which the continuity of engagement in the natural world replaces the contemplative appreciation of a beautiful object or scene. Reflecting this, environmental aesthetics is an emerging and important new domain of aesthetic investigation, and environment, like the space of relativity physics, contains the person who is appreciating it.^{xix}

^{xviii}6. This issue is the main concern of Chapter 12, "The Aesthetics of Art and Nature." The chapters that follow develop reasons for choosing a natural aesthetics of engagement, so it is not necessary to undertake that here. The larger case for engagement, in the traditional and contemporary arts as well as in environment, was made in my previous books, The Aesthetic Field (Springfield, IL: C.C. Thomas, 1970) and Art and Engagement.

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IV. environment [AE, 2-4]

What constitutes environment? The usual answer that it is our natural surroundings obviously will not do, for this overlooks the fact that most people's lives are far removed from any kind of natural setting, yet everyone is involved with environment. Indeed, such a setting is even difficult to identify, since nature, in the sense of a landscape unaffected by human agency, has long since disappeared in nearly every region of the industrialized world. Even if we expand the concept beyond the mythology of a pristine Eden to encompass the reshaped landscapes and built structures in which an increasing proportion of the world's population now lives, that does not settle the question. To think of environment in the usual sense as surroundings suggests that it lies outside the person, a container within which people pursue their private purposes. 'Environment,' moreover, is rarely defined by cultural geographers and cultural ecologists, whom we would most expect to face the question directly. Environmental researchers seem to assume that there is some thing, an environment, and that this environment is constituted by our physical surroundings. Indeed, to speak of "the" environment objectifies environment; it turns it into an entity which we can think of and deal with as if it were outside and independent of ourselves. Where, however, can we locate "the" environment? Where is "outside" in this case? Is it the landscape that surrounds me where I stand? Is it the world outside my window? The walls of my room and house? The clothes I wear? The air I breathe? The food I eat? Yet the food metabolizes to become my body, the air swells my lungs and enters my bloodstream, my clothes are not only the outermost layer of my skin but complete and identify my style, my personality, my sense of self. My room, apartment, or home defines my personal space and world. And the landscape in which I move as I walk, drive, or fly is my world, as well, ordered by my understanding, defined by my movements, and molding my muscles, my reflexes, my experience, my consciousness at the same time as I attempt

An integrated aesthetics of environment holds powerful implications, not just for aesthetic theory but for our understanding of the larger social matrix of perception and thought as well. Freed from the protective custody of the special times and places of museum visits and concert halls, the aesthetic dimension can no longer be excluded from the entire range of social interests and activities. The consequences of this are striking, for there is an aesthetic interest in city and regional planning as much as in architectural design, in the many directions of popular and folk culture as much as in the fine arts, in all human relationships rather than in special institutions reserved for artistic purposes alone. An integrated aesthetic incorporates all these in the same domain of experience without obscuring their individuality.

Environmental aesthetics, therefore, does not concern buildings and places alone. It deals with the conditions under which people join as participants in an integrated situation. Because of the central place of the human factor, an aesthetics of environment profoundly affects our moral understanding of human relationships and our social ethics. An environmental aesthetics of engagement suggests deep political changes away from hierarchy and its exercise of power and toward community, where people freely engage in mutually fulfilling activities. It implies a humane family order that relinquishes authoritarian control and encourages cooperation and reciprocity. It leads toward acceptance, friendship, and love that abandon exploitation and possessiveness and promote sharing and mutual empowerment.

to impose my will over it. Indeed, many of us spend much of our lives in the electronic space of television and computer networks. "The" environment, one of the last survivors of the mind-body dualism, a distant place which we think to contemplate from afar, dissolves into a complex network of relationships, connections, and continuities of those physical, social, and cultural conditions that describe my actions, my responses, my awareness, and that give shape and content to the very life that is mine. For there is no outside world. There is no outside. Nor is there an inner sanctum in which I can take refuge from inimical external forces. The perceiver (mind) is an aspect of the perceived (body) and conversely; person and environment are continuous.

The difficulty of trying to express the idea of environment as a seamless unity of organism, perception, and place, all suffused with values, is almost impossible to overcome in the English language. The meaning and connotation of the usual terms render them largely unuseable. Expressions like 'setting,' 'circumstances,' and 'the environment in which we live,' are inescapably dualistic. Terms like 'matrix,' 'condition,' 'field,' 'context,' and 'lifeworld' are better, although one must be on guard against the tendency to think of them objectively and dualistically, in the sense of regarding humans as placed in them rather than as continuous with them. The metaphysical bias of our culture is nearly impossible to avoid.

ABSTRACT:

Environmental concerns have become increasingly prominent over the past two decades. Many distinctive values are associated with environment: practical ones concerning the use of resources, ethical ones raised by the extinction of species and environmental pollution, practical values in assuring that the earth can support its growing human population. Central among these, though not always visible, are aesthetic values. These concern not only the beauty of the landscape and the appreciation of natural processes but the recognition of the aesthetic values embodied in the built environment, the landscape of city and countryside shaped by human action. Admitting the human hand leads us to acknowledge that what people have done to the landscape is not always good and not always beautiful. The aesthetics of environment, then, includes a critical component, the need to develop criteria for the aesthetic judgment of environment. Finally, as all environmental experience involves sensory perception, an aesthetic factor is present everywhere, and its satisfaction is one of the great fulfillments of life. What the arts have always done has been to give order to perceptual experience. And so in shaping the landscape we engage in the most extensive art of all, a collective art. In giving perceptual order to human life, we undertake a goal as much moral as aesthetic.

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