AESTHETICS AND ENVIRONMENT
To Riva Berleant
AESTHETICS AND ENVIRONMENT

THEME AND VARIATIONS ON ART AND CULTURE

Arnold Berleant
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Preface

Over the past several decades, the environment has begun to interest philosophers in several ways. Most well known are the many important ethical issues connected with our understanding and treatment of environment, both natural and human. Environmental ethics has become a major focus of what may be called practical ethics, as if its theory could ever meaningfully be kept separate from the conditions and situations of action. Interestingly enough, many of those concerned with environmental ethics have come to see the origin of ethical values in the aesthetic. Environmental ethics and environmental aesthetics are complementary, and this book reflects that conviction.

The essays collected in Aesthetics and Environment lend substance to an aesthetic concern with environment that came out of the historical, conceptual, and empirical critique developed in Re-thinking Aesthetics and my earlier books. General considerations, however, are not enough, for environmental experience is always particular. By exploring individual environments and specific cases, this collection illuminates the general approach of those books, but it also tests it and extends its meaning and scope. In particular, my interest in both the natural and built environments has led me to realize the significance of the human presence and to recognize that this very presence is, in its own right, the center of environment.

Of course, it is necessary to acknowledge that neither of these environments, natural or human, stands apart from the other, and both are best understood as realms that in experience are actually co-extensive. From the standpoint of a phenomenology of environment, one can only speak of environment in relation to human experience. Such experience and action suffuse the so-called natural world and shape the human world. Further still, inasmuch as people are embedded in these worlds, relationships, including human relationships, are part of them. These are environmental in context and in substance, as well. Thus I have been led to what I think of as ‘social aesthetics.’

This book is, then, a set of variations on aesthetics and culture, neither of these less
significant than its guiding environmental theme. Its chapters deal with the city, the shore, the water, and the garden, but also with the virtual environment and the social one. It is a theme whose variations are as endless as the possibilities of the human performers and conditions from which it is fashioned. Most of these chapters were published as independent essays over the last twenty-five years, and I appreciate the kind permission of their editors and publishers to include them here. All the essays have been revised but not altered in content, except for Chapter.12, “Subsidization of Art as Social Policy”, which has been summarily up-dated.

Because these essays were originally independent pieces, the discussions are self-contained and the chapters can be read in any order. Nonetheless certain basic motifs appear and reappear. This is especially true of Chapters 1, 2, and 3, which complement each other and chart the development of the idea of aesthetic engagement and its environmental applications. Indeed, this idea recurs throughout the book, displaying the breadth of its relevance and giving coherence to the discussion of a wide variety of topics. I hope that, as in the arts, any re-statement is not mere reiteration but adds fullness and resonance. Also, although some essays may at first appear casual or flippant in manner, all deal seriously with important questions.

This book, like my previous ones, represents work done without support from any national foundation or endowment. However, the local assistance of many small research awards from the C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University provided welcome and valuable support. I am also grateful to many colleagues, too numerous to mention here, from whom I have gained much over the years. Mary Lou Dietrich helped immeasurably in the tedious process of preparing the manuscript. Finally, this book is dedicated to my wife, Riva Berleant, from whose extraordinary knowledge, sensibility, and judgment my work has benefitted profoundly.

AB

Castine, Maine
Chapter I

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL AESTHETICS OF ENVIRONMENT

The visual influence on aesthetic experience

Aesthetics, as a discipline, retains a bond with its origins in the eighteenth century when it was named the ‘science of sensory knowledge’. Much has come to supplement this sensory base, factors such as meaning, memory, metaphor, symbol, and history, but it is important to reaffirm the central place that sense perception holds in aesthetic experience, for the senses are essential and indeed central to the study of art and natural beauty. Of course, the early emphasis of aesthetics on beauty has changed with the evolution of the arts, and today the field embraces a wide range of qualities and features of perceptual experience that may be termed, in some fashion, ‘aesthetic’. These include the ugly, the grotesque, the comic, or playful, as well as the conventionally pleasing. In fact the concept of beauty may itself be extended to cover such as these, insofar as they enable us to have experience that is both positive and aesthetic.

The nature of such experience has understandably been the subject of much discussion. Aesthetic experience has been approached from the naturalistic standpoint by Dewey, Prall, and Langfeld, from the analytic by Beardsley and Aldrich, from the phenomenological by Merleau-Ponty and Dufrenne. In fact, so important has the notion of experience been in theories of art that it may be taken as the seminal concept in modern aesthetics. Drawing from some of these sources, I shall develop here some ideas that have significant implications for an aesthetics of environment.

Aesthetic perception is usually described in visual terms: We are given not an aesthetic of experience but an aesthetic of appearance. The sense of sight has a long history in Western cultures and, throughout the twenty-five hundred years of its philosophic tradition, it is well
known how visual perception has been dominant and sight has been associated with cognitive activities. This is seen clearly in the standard stock of visual metaphors that provide the usual vocabulary for denoting acts of thought and cognition. These are familiar, from Descartes’ ‘inspection by the mind’, which confirms the truth of ideas that the mind perceives as ‘clear and distinct’ in ‘the light of nature’, to the multitude of metaphorical commonplaces reflected by the many ordinary expressions denoting comprehension. This convention has been transferred readily to the arts, so that sight, along with the other distance receptor, hearing, are the only senses traditionally admitted as legitimately aesthetic. For Plato proposed early on that only the pleasure apprehended by sight and hearing is aesthetic, and this conviction has been reiterated until recently without serious question.

I shall not review here the long history, from classical times to the present, during which visual perception reigned as a cognitive standard for art and aesthetic experience. It is a history that describes a multitude of diverse forces directing our understanding of the arts by standards other than those that derive from our perceptual experience. Religious, metaphysical, historical, and epistemological criteria provided the governing principles by which art was to be made, understood, and judged. When the study of art finally achieved its emancipation and identity late in the Enlightenment, this intellectualist, visual model was not abandoned. It became instead the governing metaphor for the explanation of aesthetic experience, which emerged as a contemplative attitude for appreciating an art object for its own sake alone. Only in the last century was this account challenged by explanations such as those based on empathy or pragmatic functionalism.

My purpose here, however, is not historical, a task I have undertaken elsewhere. I should like instead to elaborate three models of aesthetic experience, two of which appeared after aesthetics emerged as a discipline and the third of which is still nascent. These ideas are a central theme in this book and their range and complexity extend well beyond the scope of this chapter. At the same time, environmental perception offers an especially rich opportunity for illuminating aesthetic experience.
The contemplative model

The contemplative model of aesthetic experience is so securely established as to be assumed the official doctrine. Resting on a philosophical tradition that extends back to classical times, it appears to many as the very foundation of modern aesthetics, axiomatic and unchallengeable. First formulated in the eighteenth century in the writings of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and others of the British school and embodied in a systematic philosophical setting later in that period by Kant, the doctrine emerged that identifies the art object as separate and distinct from whatever surrounds it, isolated from the rest of life. Such an object requires a special attitude, an attitude of disinterestedness, that regards the object in the light of its own intrinsic qualities with no concern for ulterior purposes. Disinterestedness thus became a tenet echoed regularly through the halls of academe by such phrases as Bullough's well-known notion of psychical distance and Ortega's less gracious ‘dehumanization’. More recently, the interest in the formal properties of art objects, in their distinctive nature, in the definition of art in terms of these properties, and in psychologistic theories of aesthetic perception that develop distinctive ways of looking at art are all theoretical manifestations of the same impulse to disengage art from the social experiential matrix and assign it to a removed and elevated position. Stolnitz summed up two centuries of discussion when he defined the aesthetic attitude as ‘disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone’.

The history of landscape painting offers numerous examples that clearly reflect this doctrine of separation and distance. Such paintings characteristically derive from a conception of space modeled on the space of the physicist, more specifically the eighteenth century physicist. Space here becomes an abstraction, a medium that is universal, objective, and impersonal, independent of the objects that are situated in and move through it. Such an objective space leads to the objectification of things in it, which are then regarded from the stance of an impersonal observer. What is common to landscapes conceived through this notion of objective space is the depiction of
a scene as seen from a particular vantage point. The observer is removed from the scene and contemplates it from a distance. Such paintings illustrate the usual definition of a landscape as ‘a picture representing a section of natural, inland scenery’ that reflects the conception of a landscape as ‘an expanse of natural scenery seen by the eye in one view’.⁸

Pictorial features characteristic of these works present an objectified space and encourage an attitude of disinterestedness. The space of the painting is separated sharply from the space that surrounds it, including that of the observer, by a frame and sometimes a physical barrier. The landscape space is also discontinuous with the viewer. It often begins abruptly in the foreground, originating at the picture plane. While it may lead the eye into the space of the painting, that space is itself usually divided into separate, uncommunicating areas, the objective and divisible space of classical physics. And indeed, the desideratum seems to be to regard the painting as a totality, visually objective and complete. Division, distance, separation, and isolation are equally the order of the art and the order of the experience, for the features of the painting shape the character of our perception.⁹

So philosophically coherent a position is formidable and remains the dominant view to this day. Custom and frequency, moreover, give it great weight. One is reminded here of Laurence Sterne's ironic observation of the use we commonly make of such ideas:

> It is the nature of an hypothesis, when once a man has conceived it, that it assimilates every thing to itself, as proper nourishment; and, from the first moment of your begetting it, it generally grows the stronger by every thing you see, hear, read, or understand. This is of great use.¹⁰

This objectification of art is the predictable product of an intellectualist tradition, one that grasps the world by knowing it through objectifying it, and that controls the world by subduing it to the order of thought. Such a strategy may have secured the assent of philosophers but it has not won over the ranks of artists.¹¹ Wallace Stevens' response, in the last of his ‘Six Significant
Landscapes’, is as eloquent as it is explicit: ‘Rationalists wearing square hats / Think, in square rooms.../ If they tried rhomboids,/Cones, waving lines, ellipses – /As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon – / Rationalists would wear sombreros’. 12

Much in the modern arts, however, moves deliberately contrary to this tradition. Furthermore, one can reconsider much of the art of the past and discover that it lends itself to quite different modes of experience and to different explanations. Landscape paintings, in particular, provide telling examples, as we shall see later in this chapter.13 But let us now explore some different accounts of aesthetic experience.

The active model

There have been attempts since the eighteenth century to develop alternatives to the classical view of aesthetic experience. Some romantic theories stressed the sympathetic feeling of the appreciator while others proposed an empathetic identification with the object.14 These interpreted the experience of appreciation primarily in psychological terms, emphasizing an attitude of absorption rather than separation. During the last century, however, even though the classical theory continued its dominance, some proposals appeared that went well beyond the psychological locus of the common nineteenth century alternatives. These offered to overcome the passivity and separation of disinterested contemplation by depicting the aesthetic perceiver more as a multi-sensory, active agent than through the disengaged vision of the traditional position. These inclusive accounts offer a promising direction and have been developed in various forms. Let us consider two of them here.

We may call the first the ‘active model’. One version of this may be found in the aesthetics of pragmatism, especially in Dewey's Art as Experience, and in the phenomenological aesthetics of Merleau-Ponty. What is common to the various forms of the active model is the recognition that the objective world of classical science is not the experiential world of the human perceiver. Thus there is a sharp difference between space as it is presumably held to be objectively and the
perception of that space. A theory of aesthetic experience must derive from the latter rather than the former, from the manner in which we participate in spatial experience rather than from the way in which we conceptualize and objectify such experience.

Dewey emphasized this dissimilarity. He argued that ‘the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience’, a condition that makes art difficult to understand. Aesthetic experience must base itself on ordinary experience, experience that is ‘determined by the essential conditions of life’. Foremost among these conditions is that ‘life goes on in an environment; not merely in it but because of it, through interaction with it .... The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way’. Dewey insisted that just as life goes on through interactions of an organism with an environment that engages all the senses, art requires the full capacities of the organism to restore ‘the union of sense, need, impulse and action characteristic of the live creature’. Art stirs those inherent dispositions into activity with an intimate relation to the surroundings that the human being has acquired through evolutionary and cultural development. Such activities come as an impulsion of the organism and appear in art as an act of expression.

This activity is central. Indeed, such an act constitutes the work of art, an act in which there is a simultaneous transformation of materials and feelings. A work becomes artistic to the extent that two transformations take place, one of the materials of the artist's medium and a second of the artist’s ideas and feelings. There is, moreover, a difference for Dewey between the art product -- a painting or statue -- and the work of art. The work of art is the object working, interacting with the energies that emerge from the experience. Thus, Dewey holds, the work of art in its actuality is perception. It is clear in this portrayal of the experience of art that the organism activates the environment and perception is not exclusively visual but rather somatic: The body energizes space.\(^1\)

One can discover a curious resemblance between these ideas of Dewey, ideas that share something with the radical empiricism of William James, and the phenomenological aesthetics of Merleau-Ponty and others.\(^2\) Merleau-Ponty argued for synaesthesia as a unified collaboration of
all the senses, including touch, in a manner in which they are undifferentiated from one another. Like Dewey, perception starts with the body, and the presence of the body as *here* is the primary reference point from which all spatial coordinates must be derived. Thus the perceived object is grasped in relation to the space of the perceiver. It is not a discrete material object. ‘Perception does not give me truths like geometry but presences’. There is, so to say, an ‘intentional arc’ that supports consciousness, through which we are situated temporally, physically, socially, and in the realms of meaning. The subject who perceives ‘is my body as the field of perception and action’. Indeed, ‘the perceived thing ... exists only in so far as someone can perceive it’.  

The human body occurs through a blending of sensing and sensible, a blending in which vision is not just of but in things. Further, space is not, as it was for Descartes, a ‘network of relations between objects’ that can be seen from the outside by an impartial observer. ‘It is, rather, a space reckoned starting from me as the zero point or degree zero of spatiality. I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live in it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me’.  

O. F. Bollnow offered a similar account of space. Like Merleau-Ponty, he rejected the mathematical conception of space characterized by a pervasive homogeneity. For then all points and all directions would be of the same importance; none is distinctive and none preferred. Mathematical space allows the construction of an orthogonal axis system in which any point can be the coordinating zero point and every direction can become the coordinating axis. But this sense of space, as Heidegger put it, ‘contains no spaces and no places. We never find in it any locations....’. Instead of the homogeneous space of mathematics, Bollnow proposed the notion of lived-space, where the human body becomes the originating point of an axis system of vertical and horizontal planes. Yet the natural zero point of that system is not necessarily where the concrete living person happens to be; it is the natural place to which he belongs. It is his house that is ‘the reference point from which he builds his spatial world’, and this becomes the coordinating zero point of his reference system. Thus ‘all live movement in space occurs as a going away from or a coming back’ to the home.
Bollnow sees the inner space of the house as a private and safe space that is separated from the outer space of abandonment and danger. The world beyond the protective boundaries of the house is characterized by breadth or unrestrictedness, strangeness, and distance, yet it is opened up by roads and paths through which people structure their space as a reflection of the ‘lines of force’ along which they move. This world beyond is not undifferentiated, however. There is a middle point which is the space of the group and ultimately the space of the nation to which the individual belongs. Spatial egocentrism has long been believed and practiced, and so such outer space becomes a space of vulnerability, a place of danger and abandonment. Only in the inner space of the house is one hidden and safe. Distance, too, is not mathematical but lived. My concrete life situation produces ‘lines of force’ which structure the space I experience. Distances within lived-space, moreover, depend on a person's disposition at the time. Fear contracts space, for example, while love generates it.\(^{21}\)

The notion of the lived-body develops this sense of lived-space further. Calvin Schrag considered the body as the vital center of our spatial experience.\(^{22}\) From the body we view existential space, determine its directional axes, and measure existential distance. To conceive the spatiality of the lived body is to recognize that places and movements are perceived in relation to the body, seen as here or there. The discernment of places with their value and meanings occurs in relation to the central position of the body. ‘The proper and improper places of utensils, objects, and persons are defined within the context of these regions and territories.’ Moreover, the world is not composed only of objects and instruments for the lived body; it is also a social world. The body's field of action must recognize and take account of the presence of the other. Yet this conception remains egocentric, for the space surrounding the body is territorial, a space surrounded and limited by the space of others. The lived body dominates its surroundings, marking out territorial space over which it exercises control.

Phenomenological views as these treat space in its relation to the body and the environment, not as an independent quantity but as an intentional object in association with the perceiving body. This goes far beyond Amiel's observation that ‘every landscape is a state of
mind’. The landscape is not generated out of an act of consciousness; it emanates from the perceiving body and is infused by that body with its meanings, force, and feelings. This kind of awareness has led some recent authors to characterize architecture as ‘a matter of extending the inner landscape of human beings into the world in ways that are comprehensible, experiential, and inhabitable .... ’.23

The participatory model

Yet this is not enough. Environment is not wholly dependent on the perceiving subject. It also imposes itself in significant ways on the human person, engaging one in a relationship of mutual influence. Not only is it misleading to objectify the environment; it cannot be taken as a mere reflection of the perceiver, either. Recognizing the influence of specific environmental features makes it necessary to extend the active model of aesthetic experience to include such factors. The consciousness of self, of the lived body, and of lived space must be complemented by recognizing the influences that environment exerts on the body, how it contributes to shaping the body's spatial sense and mobility, and ultimately to the definition of its lived space. This leads us to a different conception of experiencing environment aesthetically. In this view, the environment is understood as a field of forces continuous with the organism, a field in which there is a reciprocal action of organism on environment and environment on organism, and in which there is no sharp demarcation between them. Such a pattern may be thought of as a participatory model of experience. It is perhaps easier to understand the forces that emanate from the body as it thrusts itself into the environment than it is to grasp the magnetism of environmental configurations as they exert subtle influences on the body. We sense our own vitality more directly than we apprehend the actions of spaces and masses. While body and environment extend mutually interacting forces, what distinguishes the participatory model of aesthetic experience from the active model is its recognition of the way in which environmental features reach out to affect and respond to the perceiver. This phenomenon is not new; artists and architects have long utilized it. What has been missing, however, is an articulation of how
environmental activity occurs, an account that incorporates this phenomenon within the frame of aesthetic theory. I want to suggest such an account here, for I believe that the participatory model is no special case, an exception to the prevailing observational mode in aesthetics that is required by the unique conditions of environmental experience. Rather, this is a model that can be applied successfully to other, indeed, all modes of art in the form of a general theory of aesthetic experience.  

Some psychologists have taken note of the influence of environmental features on the body, although they tend to consider these influences as derived from and dependent upon individual psychology. Kurt Lewin’s field theory is an important instance of this. Lewin's topological psychology represents the framework in which events can occur within a life space. The magnitude of such events requires the use of the concepts of ‘psychological force’ and ‘field of force’, and this led Lewin to develop a vector psychology. Lewin considered the psychological environment of an individual to directly govern behavior. Distance and direction are properties of that environment, and tendencies for or against our goals are forces exerted on a person. Since such forces concern possible courses of action or of paths within our life spaces, Lewin calls such space ‘hodological’ (from Gr. hodos, way or path). Situations possess dynamic properties, and Lewin developed concepts such as: positive and negative valence to denote the attractive or repulsive properties of a region; vectors or psychological forces that directly produce the reaction of a person; barriers or barrier-regions that may exist in the life space of an individual; and the boundary zone of the life space. Although Lewin did take somewhat into account facts that impinge on the life space, its ‘foreign hull’, as he put it, he did not devote much attention to them and was content largely to treat them in the light of their influence on the psychological environment.

Lewin's vector psychology is, then, a psychology of motivation, not of environment, but it displays the value of revealing the interpenetration of consciousness and environmental perception. Further, Lewin made some use of what he called the aufförderungscharakter or the aufförderungsqualität of a barrier region, which may be translated as ‘invitational character’ or
‘invitational quality’, for the influence that environmental features exercise on us. It is a suggestive concept and has been used by some writers in art history and town planning. More recently the perceptual psychologist James J. Gibson has spoken of ‘affordances for behavior’, a term he apparently derived from Lewin and by which he means features in the environment that influence our behavior and lead us to act in certain ways.

As is often the case in such matters, artists in their work have anticipated the theoretical formulation of a participatory aesthetic and, indeed, provide a basis for developing such an account. One can find numerous instances of invitational qualities in the visual arts by the use of features designed to elicit a participatory response in the viewer, a response often imaginative, to be sure, but perceptual and thus genuinely experienced. While the contemporary arts are rich with a multitude of ingenious uses of viewer participation, one might think that this feature is a recent innovation and anomalous in the history of the arts. That, however, is not at all the case, and so to make my claim the stronger, let us consider several historical examples of the use of such invitational features.

Portraits of the Madonna and Child in late Gothic and early Renaissance art, beginning with Cimabue and Giotto, typically place the figures on a throne that rests on a daïs reached by several steps. While these personages are flanked by angels or other figures, the steps are typically empty; they face the viewer, an unspoken invitation to mount them. In a similar fashion, Bernini’s design of St. Peter's Square opens up to invite us in and, once in, surrounds us in a columnar embrace. The entering staircase of Michelangelo's Campidoglio works in the same way, welcoming one into its stately, enclosed square.

Caravaggio’s paintings often operate in like fashion, seeking to engage the spectator directly in the action. In some of his early works, ‘Caravaggio's youths do not merely address themselves to the spectator — they solicit him .... In both The Lute Player and The Musician, for example, he places the instruments in the foreground of the picture with the neck facing outward toward the spectator — an invitation to join the musicians in their music making. Rubens’ landscape of his villa draws the viewer into the space as an invitation to visit, just as in
Vermeer's view of the artist painting, the spectator peers over the artist's shoulder to view his work in progress. This device was emulated more recently by Cartier-Bresson, who photographed groups of people from the rear in the act of looking at something, thus making us join the crowd in the act of gazing at the photograph.

Paintings of landscapes offer particularly effective illustrations of environmental action, for they contain the same kinds of features that environmental designers must fashion, and this makes them instructive models. In spite of the constraints of conventional aesthetic theory, landscape paintings often incorporate the perceiver into their space, compelling involvement. A road or river does more than organize the landscape and provide visual interest and variety. It does even more than serve to draw the eye into the painting. It may serve as an invitation, leading the viewer to enter the pictorial space. Similarly, a path often becomes the occasion for the virtual movement of the viewer’s body into the landscape. And just as a spoken word commands our attention and a question compels an answer, a road beckons to the viewer. Artistic license was not the reason for Cézanne's claim that a picture contains within itself even the smell of the landscape; it was his proposal that through the effective use of pictorial qualities a painting creates the total sensory field of experience. Again, the use of perspective in visual art of the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries implicitly recognized the position and hence the participation of the observer. By moving in toward the painting, perspective opens up the pictorial space and includes us in it, just as, conversely, modeled figures emerge from the flat canvas when we step back. Our participation, then, activates the life of the painting, the more so as we leave the observational mode.

Furthermore, it is a mistake of the observational attitude to lead us into thinking that as viewers we must encompass the entire painting in our visual field. On the contrary, to activate many landscape paintings they must be seen from too close a position to be able to view the painting as a whole. While the optimum physical distance to the canvas may vary in each case, a participatory landscape requires us to look into the space, to enter it, so to say, and become part of it. Viewing van Ruisdael’s A Forest Marsh from a close position, for instance, we look
under and past the large, gnarled limbs of the trees, and only then can we discern the figure of a boatman poling his craft through the marsh. In one of Guardi’s landscapes, to take another example, we stand in the shadow of the central group of twisted trunks which, from a distance, appear to dominate the painting. When we view the painting from up close, we become aware of the details of the activities going on beneath and beyond them, and these become the principal interest of the work. Looking at landscape paintings in this way, a remarkable inversion of importance takes place as the view dissolves into an environment.

Paintings with exceptionally large canvases may force this involvement upon us. In Monet's *Nymphias*, ‘the presence of the figure would define the scale of the picture from the inside in terms of the proportions of the human body’. Since there is no figure, ‘the picture’s scale depends on its relation to the human body of the spectator outside’. Thus the picture ‘is no longer a window to a world but the world immanent and autonomous’. One can often see in portraits a similar action on the viewer. The type and direction of the subject's gaze tends to elicit an appropriate response in the eyes of the beholder. An averted gaze makes one look tentatively at the figure so as not to be too intrusive or bold, while a downcast gaze evokes a look of superior strength. A direct gaze may produce a meeting of personalities.

When paintings are regarded as experientially active, they come to exemplify the workings of features that occur outside art. Landscape photography joins painting in achieving what art in general may do, revealing aspects and dimensions of human experience with a clarity and force that are absent under ordinary circumstances. Moreover, what is true of our perception of painting and photography when understood in the fashion I have been describing holds true for our perception of the physical environment, the same features in both can act in similar ways. Let us explore this by considering several such features of the physical landscape.

**Participatory environmental features**

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this is the path. Paths, of course, are especially rich in
significance. They are not experienced as cognitive symbols but, if one insists on using that concept, as living symbols that embody their meaning, symbols that make us act, commit our bodies, our selves, to choices. In Malcolm Lowry's comment: ‘There has always been something preternatural about paths ... for not only poetry but folklore abounds with symbolic stories about them: paths that divide and become two paths, paths that lead to a golden kingdom ... paths that not merely divide but become the twenty-one paths that lead back to Eden’. 38

But what is most striking is the way in which paths, as features of the environment, act upon us. Curves are enticing: they tempt the walker forward to see what lies around the bend. Similarly, a climbing path may invite the walker to move upward to reach its height. Then there are intrinsic delights that paths offer: the changing views, the feel of the ground under foot, the multitude of details along the way. All these exercise a dynamic attraction on the walker. In describing the hiking path, Bollnow comments that ‘the path does not shoot for a destination but rests in itself. It invites loitering. Here a man is in the landscape, taken up and dissolved into it, a part of it. He must have time when he abandons himself to such a path. He must stop to enjoy the view’. 39

Roads, like paths, act upon us in diverse ways, inviting us to move down them or putting one off. Moreover, routes are often unidirectional, more appealing in one direction than in the other: On a round trip that we make regularly, we are likely to follow one course going and a different one returning. Similarly, the habitual behavior with which we take a customary route may be explained as the largely unattended attraction of environmental cues that act upon us to lead us regularly in the same direction.

Places, plazas, parks, and gardens may be inviting or discouraging in much the same manner. Participatory spaces encourage entry; they evoke our interest and draw us in. Instead of offering a harmonious formal array that has visual appeal when regarded from a distance, there may be comfortable irregularity and disorder. Great open spaces can be divided into smaller protective ones with enclosure replacing exposure, providing an easy habitation for the body that is strikingly different from the monumental forms and spaces of such places as the Federal area
in Washington, D. C., City Hall Plaza in Boston, and the Government plaza in Brazilia.40

Buildings may also offer opportunities for participation, and when they do they contrast sharply with the usual treatment of architectural structures as visual objects. Visual buildings often display a symmetrical structure and stand apart and aloof as monumental objects. The significance of such buildings may lie primarily in a façade or the structure may devolve into pure surface, as in the curtain-wall skyscraper.41 In contrast, the building that encourages participation embraces the human scale. It is not an isolated object opposing the viewer, mounted on an eminence that sets it apart from its surroundings. It is instead an integral part of the landscape, evoking our active interest and welcoming our approach.

Nowhere can this invitation to participate be more emphatic than in the case of entrances, doorways, and stairs. These can put one off or draw one forward in ways that may be obvious or subtle. An effective entrance or doorway invites one to walk through. It does not erect obstacles that must be overcome or confusing shapes to be identified, and it does not present either intimidating or insignificant ways of passing into a place or a building. A participatory entrance is easily and clearly recognized, appropriate to the size of the body, inclusionary in its perceptual character, welcoming in its affective qualities. So, too, can a staircase invite ascent, pulling the body upward through its own rising movement. Visual outside steps may serve mainly as a pedestal to support an imposing structure, whereas participatory steps beckon us on and up.

Now these invitational features do not resemble the traditional primary qualities of physical objects, aspects inherent in them, such as mass, weight, and shape. They resemble more their secondary qualities, features of objects that excite certain perceptual responses in the viewer, such as color or smell. Neither inhering in objects nor originating in consciousness, such invitational qualities are rather characteristics to which perceptual awareness is receptive and to which it responds. They emerge only in the intimate reciprocity that is central to aesthetic engagement.

Re-thinking environment
Recognizing such traits requires us to re-think what we mean by environment. Its etymology notwithstanding, the perception of environment is not of an alien territory surrounding the self. The environment is rather the medium in which we live, of which our being partakes and comes to identity. Within this environmental medium occur the activating forces of mind, eye, and hand, together with the perceptual features that engage these forces and elicit their reactions. Every vestige of dualism must be cast off here. There is no inside and outside, human being and external world, even, in the final reckoning, self and other. The conscious body moving within and as part of a spatio-temporal environmental medium becomes the domain of human experience, the human world, the ground of human reality within which discriminations and distinctions are made. We live, then, in a dynamic nexus of interpenetrating forces to which we contribute and respond.

Marcel urged us to say not that I have a body but that I am my body. So we can say, similarly, not that I live in my environment but that I am my environment. Just as we can consider the body an extrapolation from the unity of the human person, so can we regard the environment. This means that the concept of environment must be altered to assimilate the lived body on the one hand and broadened to embrace the social on the other. The social, however, does not denote only the institutions with which people participate; it is infused with cultural meanings. We need to include, then, not only a study of physical environmental features that participate in a reciprocal fashion with the self but a correlative study of the semiotics of environment to explore the meanings that are inseparable from such features.

Understood in this manner, the environment becomes a perceptual-cultural system that embraces person and place. The features of the world we fashion can create such a condition of harmony or they can discourage it by separation and, ultimately, alienation. Heidegger wrote of the bridge as creating the banks that lie on either side, bringing ‘stream, banks, and land into each other's neighborhood’. The bridge actually ‘gathers the earth as landscape around the stream’. More than this, it ‘gathers to itself ... earth and sky, divinities and mortals’. We can,
then, dispense with the notion of space and consider location, in its stead. Moreover, it is through dwelling, belonging in a place, that the human relation appears. Thus it may be that the absence of places which speak to us and to which we belong may be the most egregious failure of mass industrial society. With the sense of place so often lacking, that is why, with home and hearth, we wander homeless and unwarmed.

A participatory model of experience thus provides a key to environmental understanding. It enables us to grasp the environment as a setting of dynamic forces, a field of forces that engages both perceiver and perceived in a dynamic unity. What is important are not physical traits but perceptual ones, not how things are but how they are experienced. In such a phenomenological field the environment cannot be objectified; it is rather a totality continuous with the participant.

An environment can be shaped to encourage participation or it can be structured to intimidate, control, or oppress people. When design becomes humane, it not only fits the shape, movements and uses of the body; it also works with the conscious organism in an arc of expansion, development, and fulfillment. This is a goal that a deliberately articulated aesthetic can help accomplish. A participatory aesthetic can be a powerful force in transforming the world we inhabit into a place for human dwelling.
NOTES

9. In ‘Perception of Perspective Pictorial Space from Different Viewing Points’ (Leonardo, 10, 4 (Autumn 1977), 283-288), Rudolf Arnheim illustrates the tendencies (1) to allow the geometry of perception to dominate the phenomena of perception (cf. p. 287/l, 286/l) and (2) to objectify the spatial object so that it is disparate to the viewer's space. See also M. H. Pirenne, Optics, Painting and Photography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Arnheim refers to H. Maertens who determines ‘That from a distance twice the length of a painting's longer dimension, the whole will be seen comfortably at an angle subtending about 27 degrees’. Arnheim seems to aver that ‘unless the total visual pattern is comprehended within this range, it cannot be seen and judged as an integrated whole’. The Dynamics of Architectural Form


11. This is not the place to offer a survey of tendencies and works by artists of this century that contradict the classical model of aesthetic perception. That is a project I have done elsewhere. *Cf.* ‘Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts’, *Re-thinking Aesthetics*, Ch. IV; ‘The Art of the Unseen’, *Re-thinking Aesthetics*, Ch. 9; and ‘The Historicity of Aesthetics’, Ch. 2.


14. Eugene Véron and Leo Tolstoy are instances of the first; Theodor Lipps and Vernon Lee of the second.


24. Since the original publication of this essay, I developed the participatory model into the concept of aesthetic engagement, elaborated in *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991) and subsequent publications.


30. I am indebted to the painter and art historian Palko Lukács for this example.


32. *Ibid*.

33. “The Viewer in the Landscape” develops this theme. See note 13 above.


41. ‘Its potential for pulling us into the realm of a movement or sound game is almost nil. We can neither measure ourselves against it nor imagine a bodily participation’. Robert J. Yudell, in

42. M. Heidegger, *op. cit.*, 152, 153, 156-57.
Environmental dislocation as estrangement

The concern for the environment that has grown to global proportions marks an important stage in the evolution of social awareness. Although major environmental damage results from the cumulative effects of private actions in the service of immediate interests, a broader view of the social and physical consequences of individual actions has emerged. Most people in the world can no longer deny or escape the harmful effects of toxic food, oppressive noise, polluted air, water shortages, and the physical, psychic, and social disorders to which they contribute. Such conditions have finally achieved the status of problems that can no longer be ignored. They demand a solution and social and political measures have slowly and painfully begun to develop, for significant change can occur only through collective action.

Beyond condemning environmental waste, abuse, and damage, we discover that there is still more involved than their harmful physical and functional effects. As significant as these are, they are just the visible, public symptoms of an underlying social disorder. They reflect nothing less than an estrangement from the living context of human life, a setting that is at once social, physical, and cultural.

Such environmental dislocation is, to be sure, neither universal nor inevitable. Morally convenient though it may be to generalize the condition, alienation from our environment is not an unavoidable consequence of social life. The lack of environmental harmony today is perhaps more typically the result of a number of factors present in the contemporary world, including the overwhelming power of industrial technology, acquisitiveness on a global scale, and the widespread disregard of all but immediate, personal benefits.

Other cultures and other times have shown us otherwise. Yet the mythologies of environmental harmony are not merely primitive or quaint. Rather, they dramatize the wisdom of
ways of social living as part of the world, ways in which survival and well-being are the rewards of success. Anthropologists and social historians have documented how different peoples have achieved ecological balance living under a variety of different technological limitations and environmental conditions. However, our industrialized world, with its highly developed technology and irrepressible productivity, has contributed to a rapid increase in population with an insatiable appetite for material goods and benefits. To our own misfortune we have ignored the imperative of balance.

We might expect that philosophers would have recognized the state of dislocation and its causes. In the past some, like Aristotle and Spinoza, did develop comprehensive visions of the harmony of human and nature that illuminated the conditions and needs of their times. More recent philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and John Dewey fashioned empirical scientific outlooks and discerned directions for their use that were designed to reconcile human activities with natural circumstances.

Simply adopting one of those philosophical outlooks cannot suffice today. These intellectual visions stand in the perspective of their own times and carry the limitations of their historicity. Moral philosophy offers no straightforward guidance, either. There is a note of apologia in the history of ethics, from the Stoics and Epicureans, through Aristotle and Kant, to many analytic philosophers of the present. Most systems of ethics provided a justification for the values and practices that prevailed at the time they wrote.

The philosophy of nature has itself had a mixed career. As the early seedbed of the sciences, natural philosophy developed methods and concepts, accumulated data, and elaborated theories that later emerged as independent sciences. Philosophical views responding to major phases of scientific progress, such as philosophies of evolution, sociobiology, and recent philosophy of science, have tended to accept the issues, methods, and goals of the science from which they derive, and their application to moral matters often produced some of the more egregious intellectual abuses of science. Rarely has philosophy helped guide reflective leaders in determining the directions and goals of science and of society and in elaborating both the place
of science and its limitations in the cultural spectrum.

Not only do we fail to find in the sciences a harmonious reconciliation of natural and human forces; it is no longer possible to entertain a bucolic model of the state of humans in nature. Rousseau’s natural man has no place in a world that has been soiled wherever the hand has touched. The responsibility for shaping the human world lies in intelligent human action, but there is no easy or simple guide to be found in nature or science. An ecological model may suggest the harmony for which we seek, but it is more a vision and a useful guide than a clear and straightforward answer.

There needs to be an incentive to create a harmonious human environment, consciously and intentionally. This is not only a scientific task nor is it simply a technical problem that can be placed in the hands of architects or designers. While contributions from all these are necessary, we must begin with a vision that reflects present historical and technological conditions, and there must be a political mechanism and a political will to implement that vision. We need to have a conception of the harmonious balance of human needs with environmental conditions that the planner, architect, and designer can embody in material form and living experience. It is here that a philosophical contribution can be made.

To this end, let me offer some observations on the design of the human environment from a philosophical perspective. My particular intent is to identify the basic factors that combine to provide the matrix that is embodied in any environmental setting. As we shall see, these will include its aesthetic conditions, for these are fundamental to all experience. I shall begin by identifying several contrasting conceptions of the relation of a building to its site. Next I want to carry forward some of the ideas about environmental experience and ways of representing it that were explored in the last chapter. Finally, I shall join ideas about the building-site relation with others about experience to develop some suggestions for guiding the design of environment from the standpoint of a phenomenology of environmental experience.

The relation of building and site
Buildings may be connected to their sites in many ways, and each choice reflects more than a design decision. The setting of a building is a material embodiment of beliefs about how the human place is related to the environment. A building stands as the concrete form of such beliefs and its placement displays a vision that grasps things in a particular way. A structure on its site may depict the human abode in the world in a variety of contrasting modes, such as aloofness, separation, enclosure, balance, continuity, or integration.

A building that stands alone is an isolated object. It may aspire to monumentality, as skyscrapers and cathedrals do. With their upward thrust they look to the space above them, whether from motives of spirituality or reasons of economy. The surrounding space becomes but an incidental circumstance. It may be abstract, reduced from the inside to colored light admitted through stained glass and excluded by massive stone walls, or the space may be distant, viewed from a steeple or observation deck, where a panoramic view spreads into the distance but the building’s site or setting is hidden. When a dwelling or small building is isolated on its site, the surrounding space frequently does not exist, either because the structure is blind to its space or because it is contiguous with other buildings. Such a conception of building may be called monolithic.

Setting a building in the space of its immediate surroundings softens the abrupt boundaries of its exterior walls and expands its limits. This may consist simply in placing the skyscraper or cathedral on a plaza. More significantly, a building’s setting may be elaborated with sensitivity, suitable to the scale and significance of the structure, as in the formal pool of the Taj Mahal and the gardens of Versailles. Commonly the scope is not so grand, as when foundation planting helps a house settle gently into its plot. In such cases the site often exhibits a clear boundary in the form of a wall, a fence, or a road that defines the limits of the surrounding space. This may be called a cellular conception of building, in which the structure is the nucleus of its immediate site. As a cliché of suburban housing developments, clusters of these cells may spread over vast areas, such as the Los Angeles basin, loosely connected pieces
of domestic protoplasm of a largely inchoate creature.

The need for greater harmony of design is recognized in construction that shapes an environment of its own. This *organic* conception of building may take the form of a city square serving a residential, cultural, or commercial purpose. Here the façades of the surrounding buildings define the limits of the open space and, together with the layout of the plan, the texture and pattern of the ground surface, the arrangement of volumes such as monuments and fountains, and the use of color and shape, combine to create a relatively complete and self-contained setting. One of the most brilliant and successful examples of the city square is the Piazza San Marco, in which the irregular shape of its space, its Renaissance façades, its volumes and colors, and the patterned marble of its pavement join with the crowds of pedestrians to achieve a remarkable synthesis.

The organic model of building appears in many guises. It can be a neighborhood or district composed of architecturally similar structures, as in the old town section of a city, a building-plaza complex, an industrial park, and a new town. A particularly felicitous use of this model may be found in the college campus designed as a total environment. Of many examples, Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario and The State University of New York at Purchase are two striking ones. There are visionary forms of this organic model, as in Schulze-Fielitz's Space City⁴ or Soleri's Arcologies, where the construction of a total urban environment is upward, housing all city functions in a multi-tiered, largely self-contained structure.

A still different model of building attempts to elaborate a structure that is sensitive to the physical characteristics of its location, incorporating these into the design of the building and reaching for a harmonious unity of structure and site. Here the design complements the site, carrying out its suggestions, embodying its distinctive features, affirming its place by adaptation rather than by imposition. This *geologic* conception of building integrates structure and site, blending the construction into the physical and qualitative features of the natural environment. From peasant villages that have accreted to their sites over long centuries, merging with their rocky hillsides, embracing protected harbors or nestling among hills, to the traditional New
England farmstead that seems to have grown out of the land, indigenous architecture and its derivations often respect the landscape, adapting and adjusting over time to the economy of conditions and need. Contemporary architects have sometimes turned to this model, as in the classic example of Wright's “Falling Water”, which embodies the overhanging rocky strata of its brook site, in John Andrew's design of Scarborough College, which wraps along a steep hillside, and Paolo Soleri's Arcosanti, where pueblo-like cliff dwellings of concrete structures harmonize with the sun and stone of the American Southwest.

These four relations of building to site — the monolithic, the cellular, the organic, and the geologic — are familiar ones, and while they may be combined at times, they exemplify different sensibilities toward the human environment. They are not only ways of seeing, of sensing space and of apprehending the qualitative characteristics of the building place. More than these, the models represent different, perhaps progressive stages of the condition of human habitation in our world. They exhibit more than ways of building; they provide ways of being. For each of these different building-site relations reflects a distinctive conception of the human environment. Each provides a sensory embodiment of that conception. And, most important of all, each shapes and directs the experiential world of its inhabitants. Let me suggest how that is so by turning next to environmental experience.

**Models of environmental experience**

Any account of experience must deal with the multiple meanings and conceptual ambiguity of the term, itself. For our purposes here, we may distinguish two basic models for the analysis of environmental experience, corresponding roughly to the discussion of aesthetic appreciation in the preceding chapter: the psychological or spectator model, and the contextual or field model.

The psychological account has been long established in the Anglo-American empirical tradition and it is so customary that it usually operates as an unspoken premise. According to this view, experience strikes us from the outside and we respond by receiving, absorbing, and
reacting to external stimuli primarily as observers. The principal sensory channel here is vision, the customary effect of experience takes the form of an image (often revealingly called an ‘idea’), and the characteristic response is cognitive apprehension. The world is thus outside us and the act of experience produces connections that bring together separate and distinct objects with a perceiving subject.

There is an irreducible dualism in this spectator conception of experience and it leads inevitably to a sense of distance and even to estrangement from the world. In aesthetics, as we noted earlier, this model is used to describe the appreciation of art as an experience requiring an attitude of disinterested awareness, of psychical distance, of the contemplation of an isolated object dissociated from any direct connection with use or practice. In architectural design, this psychological view of experience may be found in the monolithic conception of building, where the structure stands oblivious of its surroundings. It appears to a lesser degree in the cellular model, where the building in its immediate site stands as a discrete and self-contained unit. And it is reflected in the use of walls and fences as protective barriers against a hostile world, in the visual approach to architectural design illustrated by the separation of façade from structure and exterior from interior, and in the spectator attitude toward design, where the view of buildings and areas seen from a distance is the standard by which they are known and judged.

A fundamentally different alternative appears in the contextual or field model of experience, resembling the active and participatory modes of appreciation. Unlike the spectator view which reflects its origin in the contemplative ideal of knowledge, the contextual orientation exhibits the concern with action and function found, as we already noted, in the American pragmatic tradition and continental existential-phenomenological philosophy. Human beings here are embedded in the world, implicated in a constant process of action and reaction. One cannot stand apart. On the contrary, a biological continuity of body and physical setting, a psychological continuity of consciousness and culture, a harmony of sensory awareness and movement all make the human person inseparable from the environmental setting. Traditional dualisms, such as those separating idea and object, self and others, and inner consciousness and
external world, dissolve in the integration of human and world. The environment is not outside to be experienced from within nor can it even be construed as surroundings: by being participants in the world, people become continuous with it. This contextual view of experience grasps architectural form by joining structures with environment, as in the organic and geologic conceptions of building. It is reflected in efforts to penetrate and dissolve the barrier wall, to encourage the fluidity of interior and exterior space by means of glass windows, walls, and doors. It occurs in the sliding walls of Japanese domestic architecture and the continuity of its floor plans with outside porches and patios, and in the interior garden, to cite a few examples.

In discarding the predominantly visual approach to environment, the contextual model gives a central place to the person as a perceiving body in an experiential field. The sensuous organism is the center of experience, not as a passive recipient of stimuli but as a dynamic factor in the world. A participant rather than a spectator, the human person joins in the movement of things very much as a performer does in theater or dance, activating the materials with which one deals, integrating them with one’s body, and leading them to one’s ends by responding with sensitivity to their requirements.

Various strands in recent philosophic history have led to this interpretation of experience. Hegelian process metaphysics of the nineteenth century combined with evolutionary philosophy in John Dewey's picture of the human organism embedded in the world. We have already recounted how Dewey describes humans as doing and undergoing, actively engaged in confronting and resolving difficulties and responding to conditions that impinge upon them while striving to attain and surpass the goals that lie endlessly before them. In such a world there is no standing apart from the course of events: It is a world of continuities and not of separations, it consists in a fluidity of provisional forms and ideas to be known and judged by their capacity for assisting the organism in its forward movement. There are common patterns in various experiences whose subject matter may be unlike. This is ‘set by the fact that every experience is the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives.’ Such a concept of experience bears directly and immediately on art, for ‘art, in its form, unites
the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience.\textsuperscript{4}

Cartesian subjectivism, Husserlian phenomenology, and Marxian materialist dialectics combined in the existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to produce the conception of a conscious body, perceiving and acting, shaping the self through its actions and being formed by the creative influence of the environment on the vital subject. The body, for Merleau-Ponty, is like a work of art. By how I live and act I make my body what it is. At the same time the environment exercises a creative influence in shaping the body's gestures and actions. Perception, then, is a bodily act within the field of conscious experience. ‘To perceive is to render oneself present to something through the body’.\textsuperscript{5}

More recently, the psychologist James J. Gibson developed a view of perception as an activity of the moving body. Going beyond the subjectivism that pervades much discussion of the psychology of perception, Gibson's perceiver is an active participant in the world. Thus, ‘the individual does not have to construct an awareness of the world from bare intensities and frequencies of energy; he has to detect the world from invariant properties in the flux of energy’.\textsuperscript{6}

What bearing does such a conception of experience have on environmental design? Its significance is profound. Generalizing the participatory model of environmental perception, the body as an organic, social, conscious organism is understood as a material node that is both the generator and the product of environmental forces. As part of that environmental field, we both shape and are shaped by the experiential qualities of the world we inhabit. Indeed, it is impossible to set us apart from our perceptual world: we are, in fact, continuous with it. Moreover, as participants embedded in an experiential field, we cannot stand aloof from our world. Thus the body is forever in space and acts within the fluidity of the spatial medium. Through the movement of a conscious body we generate temporal awareness, and the continuing transformation of space and time through movement generates our human reality. This continuity of body and environment attains perhaps its most complete consciousness in the experience of
art. Berenson was one commentator who recognized this: ‘When the spectator is at one with the work of art, ... he ceases to be his ordinary self and the ... aesthetic quality is no longer outside himself. The two become one entity: time and space are abolished and the spectator is possessed by one awareness’.  

How is it possible to represent for the purposes of environmental design such a pervasive field of experience and action from which the human participant is inseparable? The usual tactic of removal and distance is unavailable, since the environmental reality in which we live is our world, and to presume to stand outside it vitiates both the structure and the authenticity of its participatory properties. To be sure, we are able to construct conceptual frames that identify the experiential features of various environmental orders. Indeed, insofar as these orders themselves result from convictions about the nature of the world and human experience, a conceptual scheme may have value for recognizing and typing them. Let me illustrate how this may be done by citing one particularly useful proposal.

The anthropologist Magoroh Maruyama has identified four meta-principles of environmental design that are reflected in different cultures and historical periods and that represent alternative ways of ordering the human world. The hierarchical principle is homogenistic, achieving unity by similarity, repetition, and sameness. There is a dominant theme that is then reflected in subordinate themes. Space is a transparent mass having an identity and boundaries to which volume and mass are opposed. Building is designed to persist in time and exemplify permanent principles. Lines between objects are straight, often radiating from a point or converging on one. The perceiver has a distinct and self-contained identity as a point moving in space in pre-planned and sequential patterns.

A second meta-principle is the independent-event model, random and heterogenistic in its nature, in which space, objects, movement, and relationships between objects are haphazard, self-sufficient, independent and unrelated to others. The homeostatic meta-principle is a third one, according to which diverse elements are arranged in a static harmony. Although design may be asymmetrical and unrepeatitive, a balance is striven for. Space here is conceived as a
miniature, self-contained universe of interacting heterogeneous elements in equilibrium in which
the perceiver gains simultaneous awareness of the entire design. Unlike the first two principles
which involve separation of outside and inside or of objects from one another, the homeostatic
principle encourages the continuation of outside into inside.

A fourth meta-principle of design is the morphogenetic, embodying a shifting harmony of
diverse elements. This allows multiple and changing interpretations and is deliberately
incomplete, open to new elements and changes. One locality is connected with others and objects
with their space. There is increasing heterogeneity, with the constant addition of new elements
and change in patterns. Movement is in curves and spirals and follows unprogrammed
alternatives.

While Maruyama considers these to be epistemologies, they are more than ways of
knowing the world. They are ways of being and, as such, grant order to the human realm. The
four schema represent historico-cultural orderings of things and hence suggest implicit social
decisions about the nature and processes of the world. There is, however, an important difference
between conceptual schema and experiential orders. To be sure, experience can to a degree
accommodate alternative schema without their becoming insurmountable obstructions to the
activities of supporting and furthering the well-being of the people who live by them. And
conceptual orders permit and encourage some kinds and patterns of behavior and experience and
disallow others. However, any recognition of the conditions under which human life
must proceed has to acknowledge that there is a limit to the arbitrary and stipulative possibilities
of an accurate conceptual order. Such an account must reflect the basic invariant conditions of
the human environment as well as its various local and historical forms, and the morphogenetic
scheme seems to do this most effectively under present conditions of knowledge.

Any conceptual representation is, however, distinct from what it purports to describe.
One is reminded of Bergson's distinction between absolute and relative knowing. Relative
knowing requires a point of view from which we regard an object and symbols by which we
conceptualize its characteristics. Absolute knowing, on the contrary, demands neither standpoint
nor symbol but rather expects that we enter into the object. Instead of a descriptive analysis, which represents the object by translating it into symbols different from itself, we must gain an identity with the object. ‘Were all the photographs of a town, taken from all possible points of view, to go on indefinitely completing one another, they would never be equivalent to the solid town in which we walk about?’ Bergson's means of gaining such knowledge is intuition, a method perhaps insufficient for our purpose. But his point is clear: Something can only be known in its unceasing mobility from within rather than without, directly and not by rendering it static and lifeless through the mediation of symbols.

**Designing the human environment**

Is it possible to develop a scheme for dealing with the perceptual environment without distorting it through abstraction and immobility? To be sure, we cannot dispense with symbols entirely. Yet these must be symbols of immanence, not transcendence. They must reflect the world in the directness of participation and not the distance of contemplation and objective analysis. To do this we need to construct an order of representation that is primarily perceptual rather than conceptual, that describes the realm of environmental experience as it is encountered rather than as it is contemplated, that proceeds through participation and not by abstraction. Such an approach must be empirical, sensory, phenomenological, and not primarily conceptual and symbolic. Let me offer some suggestions on how this may be done.

An experiential approach to environmental design can take its cue from the artist rather than the engineer, for planners, in constructing the conditions for human experience, work with their materials in much the same manner as the painter, the sculptor, or the composer. All artists shape sensory media to produce a sequential order of perceptual experience, and by approaching the design of environment in this way, we recognize that ‘environmental planning is an aesthetic process’.

What are the distinctive materials that the environmental planner shapes to create a
perceptual realm? One might be tempted to answer, in contrast to the artist, real space, physical structures, the geological and geographical conditions of a given place. These actualities must indeed be dealt with. Yet perceptually they stand ever in relation to the people living with and sensorially aware of them, people whose conscious capacities both order and are shaped by those conditions. Thus human space is always known through the body's capacities for seeing, moving, touching, hearing -- the multi-dimensional world of sensory awareness that joins with the attitudes, expectations, memories, and knowledge that allow and filter such awareness. It is necessary to join a model of building with an understanding of environmental experience that does not place the two together as the sum of separate factors but regards them as a primal unity, primitive in the sense of being primary, a seamless whole that antecedes any division.

We must, then, reconstrue our account of ‘real space’, of ‘physical materials’, and of ‘geological and geographical conditions’ by describing them within the order of experience and not as purportedly ‘objective’ entities apart from them. Several dimensions of environmental experience are basic.

Space has many faces, from an abstraction in physics and astronomy to the practical concerns of packaging. The Newtonian conception of physical space as an empty container that is a reference against which one can measure size, distance, and velocity consigns space to the status of a realm inhabited by the energy of light and gravity and within which movement and objects can be measured by a geometric system of Cartesian coordinates. When we turn to the experiential depiction of space, we find that it is characteristically described in the language of visual consciousness. Space is discerned in the relation of an observer to objects by which linear connections are formed among them. ‘Space perception occurs only in the presence of perceivable things’. ‘It is created by a particular constellation of natural and man-made objects to which the architect contributes’.12

This visual model of space is the silent assumption of most discussions of architecture and planning. Concern lies with how objects are to be placed in spatial emptiness, and especially on how they will be seen in relation to each other.13 Once functional considerations have been
met in the placement of buildings, the aesthetics of urban planning is replete with examples of the visual approach to space. The appeal that the vista has for planners is a prime instance. The vista is a preeminently visual experience. It offers the broad and unbroken view that can impress an image on our consciousness so vividly that it becomes one of the most notable identifications of particular cities. Such vistas as Park Avenue in New York and the Champs Elysees in Paris are literally spectacular instances of visually compelling urban spaces. Our cities are filled with countless less monumental examples. Yet because visual perception is rectilinear, these grand avenues and boulevards are straight lines. We do not see in curves or around corners, hence such visual drama requires ruler-edge rigidity.

It might seem difficult for there to be any alternative to the static, axially oriented visual space of Renaissance and Beaux Arts planning for urban aesthetics, but this is true only if we accept the spectator model of experience. These urban vistas are not spaces of the body: they are spaces for the eye, spaces to seen but not inhabited. Construing experience as a contextual field suggests otherwise.

Instead of spaces laid out as if they were viewed in perspective from a fixed point, planning from a contextual model of experience will shape urban space as the setting for the living body in motion. Just as few straight lines or flat planes exist in the natural environment before the visually guided human hand has ‘rationalized’ it, so urban space can be shaped for the dynamic organism. A curved path or road, for example, is kinesthetic as much as visual. It beckons one to move down it and around the curves. A basic aesthetic appeal of the city is to the person as pedestrian, and this appeal takes the form of an attraction to the moving body, enticing one to follow along a street in relaxed rhythms of stopping and starting and wandering along. The road suitable for vehicular movement is different in degree rather than in kind. Its lines and curves lead us along at differing rates of motion, and a well-designed highway keeps us attentive as well as physically primed.

(T)he beautiful street is beautiful — not only because of the fixed objects
which line it — but also because of the meaningful relationships it generates for
the person-in-motion. His movement is the purpose for the space, and it should
function to activate his kinesthetic experience in a series of interesting rhythms
and variations in speed and force. The qualities of moving up and down on ramps
and steps, of passing under arches and through buildings, of narrowing and
widening of spaces, of long and closed views, of stopping and starting are
qualities which make a vital urban experience for the walker and his mobile point
of view.¹⁵

There are many shapes that relate to open space in addition to the street, such as the
square, the plaza, the garden, the park, the stairway, the doorway. All these function differently
in an urban setting that is experienced as participatory rather than visual. City squares that are
rectangular, oval, circular, L-shaped or irregular feel different and excite different responses, as
do variations in size. Visual plazas intimidate the person; they typically reflect the geometrical
forms of square, rectangle, and circle and they enclose large areas. Other, less formal shapes are
more likely to engage the body as a dynamic inhabitant, as do smaller and more intimate spaces.
Park areas vary in much the same fashion, from the visual malls on either side of the Washington
monument to the pedestrian Central Park in New York. Gardens exhibit a similar range. The
symmetry of a French formal garden is admired best from a distance. The Japanese stroll garden
can only be experienced by walking through it, delighting in the intimate views, in the surprises
that lie around each turn of the path, in the feel of the stones under foot, and in the sequence of
discoveries that only the participant can encounter. Gateways mark an opening in a boundary or
a barrier. They may be designed, like the Arc de Triomphe, to impress spectators visually and
overwhelm them physically by their magnitude and mass. Or they may provide a physical
experience of the transition from one space to another.

Urban space, of course, is not always open, it is usually populated by objects that are part
of that space. Yet our ways of responding to mass reflect the same difference in urban
experience. Mass may be seen as objects opposed to space, defining it by imposing limits or introducing barriers. Trees, pillars, and walls may function by surrounding and blocking space, statues and fountains by dividing it from within, buildings by defining its limits. Yet we can also experience an object as a physical mass that acts on the human body through its proportions and density. Every object radiates into its surrounding space and this aura affects those persons in its neighborhood. Sculpture epitomizes this property of mass, for the perceptual analog of a magnetic field surrounds sculptural objects, attracting those who enter its radiance. Sculpture thus occupies its surrounding space as well as its actual mass, and in approaching the object we enter that space and become part of it. In this respect sculpture is only a dramatic instance of the spatial activity of every object. When we enter their presence, objects may induce calm or anxiety. They can shelter or oppress, invite or repel, collaborate or intimidate. We thus join with objects in a spatial configuration.

Moreover, a person's movement through space is never effortless. Space is itself an obstruction, a rarified or liquid mass, a medium through which we move much as fish swim through water. Objects, then, are not solids opposed to empty space; they are part of that space, condensations of it, so to say. Thus in Japan, a rock, in representing the mononoke that permeates a locality, acquires the quality of the space it inhabits, condensing that space rather than opposing it. A continuity of space and mass thus emerges in which space is rarified mass and mass concentrated space.

Yet we must go farther, for such homogeneity also extends to the human body in space. Through its movement the dynamic body activates space. As participants in a space, people may share its properties: its expansiveness, pressure, ease and openness, tension, and lines of force. Like the qualitative experience of works of art, the range of spatial qualities is endless. Every urban space, as every environmental space, is a performance space. As such it requires participation, and through participation it becomes a social space. Environmental planning is thus inevitably social planning. Planning thus shapes more than the physical surroundings; it shapes the qualities of human life and thus becomes a prime determinant of culture.
In its broadest outlines, then, the human environment is given shape by human agency and in turn gives shape to its inhabitants. To understand how this happens, we must know the environment as participants, not as observers. Yet this is seldom done, in part because we have few concepts and techniques by which to approach this. The very devices used by architects and planners are often the devices of spectators rather than of inhabitants. The site or building plan, the elevation, the isometric projection, the model, the aerial view, all these exemplify the disinterested viewer's relation to the environment. They describe the fixed structures and enclosed spaces of the environment as seen from without. Even landscape plans tend to concentrate on the masonry of structures and to treat plantings as static rather than as masses changing over time.17 We have few perceptual tools by which to approach the design of movement, the movement of people, of light, of seasons, of time itself. Nor do we stress the need to shape the environment from within as participants. The human environment, however, is lived space and, as such, must be experienced as continuous, vital, and inseparable from the people who inhabit it. Not only must we understand the environment in this fashion; we must develop fuller consciousness of its perceptual properties so that we become more responsive to its dynamic workings and at the same time more deliberate in determining its shapes.

It is in the arts that perceptual experience finds its richest domain. Here the sensory world of qualitative perception may flourish. The visual, the auditory, the tactile, the kinesthetic all elaborate their possibilities with subtlety and power for those who have developed an appreciative capacity. We can discover in the recent arts a particular sensitivity to environmental perception; indeed it is here that we may encounter the qualities of human space most directly. John Marin's active sea and mountain landscapes, Kokoshka's dynamic urban landscapes, de Stael's compositions that shape a contiguity of mass and space, Merce Cunningham's cultivation of ordinary movement in dance -- these are random instances of an endlessly varied exploration by artists of the last century of the perceptual possibilities of the human realm. Art here functions as a perceptual vanguard, leading us to discover features of environmental experience that are recognized as vital aspects of the contemporary world.
In no case is this more significant than in those arts that bridge the cultural chasm between the aesthetic and the practical, between art and life. The environmental arts of architecture, design, landscape architecture, and city and regional planning offer profound opportunities for recognizing and realizing human values by enlarging the capacity and range of experience. The arts of environmental design do more than give shape to space; they create the human realm, the possibilities of vision, audition, and movement. In determining the qualitative features of human life, these environmental arts thus shape human culture and, in so doing, hold meaning and importance of the greatest magnitude.

With such a role and such an influence, the arts of the environment are the equal of any. At a time in history when environmental design is both more insistent and more essential, it is necessary to develop the concepts and techniques that will enable them to fulfill these possibilities. Exposing and identifying the preconceptions with which we approach the environmental arts can aid the designers of human worlds in recognizing their powerful influence and in using it with intelligence, sensitivity, and humility. In the arts of environmental design, the needs of the future become the opportunity of the present.
NOTES

1. This chapter is based in part on papers given at meetings of the Environmental Design Research Association in 1983 and 1984 and other lectures and has not been published previously in this form.


12. Ibid., pp. 10, 13


15. Ibid., p. 197. One of the designers of Disney World, south of Orlando, Florida, made a telling
observation on its planning: ‘We really had to get rid of all those architects. They didn't know anything about how people walk down a street. We went back to our own people — and they laid out all the successions of images, of colors, of graphics, and so on that finally make a street. Disney World is really made up of a lot of images like that — all moving you on’. Quoted in Peter Blake, ‘Warning: The Surgeon General has determined that Open Space...’, in *Urban Open Spaces*, (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 1979). p. 6.


In ‘The Garden of Forking Paths’, the metaphysical fabulist Jorge Luis Borges tells of a novel written in the form of an infinite labyrinth in which each of the choices in the plot leads to an endless succession of further choices. This is a labyrinth of time yet, like one of space, its novelistic form allows every choice to remain poised in time, eternally open and possible. He describes it as ‘... an infinite series of times, a growing, dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times. That fabric of times that approach one another, fork, are snipped off, or are simply unknown for centuries, contains all possibilities’. If this story had been published today instead of in 1941, we might think of it as a play on interactive fiction or computer games, suggesting a postmodern sense of an infinite number of realities, each definite in itself and each permanently possible, as exemplifications of Borges's imaginative fabrications.

Following Borges's garden trope, I want to speak, not of a spatial maze or a temporal one, but of a labyrinth of experience, a maze that is spatial and temporal both, but also dynamic, all three -- space, time, and motion -- simultaneous and inseparable. For in thinking about the garden, or any landscape, for that matter, we make choices about how we come to experience it, and our initial choice leads to an unending series of further choices along the path taken at the outset. It is that first fork in the garden path that concerns me here.

Meanings of the Landscape

People may be concerned with the landscape in various ways. Some may identify with their ‘home’ landscape and see their lives in relation to it. Others may regard a landscape as a natural resource, a building site, or real estate. The landscape may be related to a nation's history and its national identity and culture, or it may figure as a political issue. Environmental groups consider the landscape a common human resource and are preoccupied with what happens to it.
Because of such different interests, landscape means different things to different people. But one value, often unspoken, underlies many of these -- its aesthetic value. Aesthetic interests frequently play a part in the value that environmentalists find in the landscape, and the frequency with which places of unusual natural beauty are made into parks and preserves shows how widely aesthetic interests are recognized. An aesthetic element is present, too, in the idea of a cultural landscape, the cluster of perceptual characteristics that gives a distinctive identity to the landscape of a particular country or region. A country's characteristic landscapes may contribute to its sense of identity, as do the forests and lakes of Finland, the South African veldt, the great plains of the American West, and the Andes of Peru. Typical land use patterns also form distinctive cultural landscapes, and these patterns change with social and technological changes, such as increasing urbanization, suburban spread and the development of factory farming.

In this chapter I want to focus on the experiences of landscape, and of gardens, in particular, and about the meanings that reflect these experiences. Of a number of possible meanings and experiences, two orientations are basic and fundamentally different from each other. Let us call them here the observational landscape and the engaged landscape. We have explored these in the preceding chapters but we shall pursue them further in this one, particularly in relation to garden landscapes. For there has been a subtle shift in the meaning of landscape that reflects a change that has occurred in our experience. This shift can be traced back to the early 1900s but has become more pronounced and explicit in the last half century, where a change in experience has begun to seep into the very meaning of landscape.

To illustrate this change in meanings, let me start by referring to two definitions of landscape given in editions of the Oxford English Dictionary some fifty years apart. The first, appearing in 1933, offered what may be called the traditional meaning of the word: ‘a view or prospect of natural inland scenery, such as can be taken in at a glance from one point of view’. In 1987 it was supplemented by this one: ‘A tract of land with its distinguishing characteristics and features, especially considered as a product of modifying or shaping processes and agents (usually natural). These seemingly similar definitions actually reflect differences in experience.
The first signifies the landscape considered visually or what we may call the observational landscape. The second implies the landscape in relation to natural events and human activities, the landscape with which we participate actively, or what we might call the engaged landscape.

Landscape architects shape the environments in which humans experience the world and thus determine the character and quality of that experience. By articulating the differences between the observational and the engaged landscape, we can understand better how design is able to create landscapes that reflect the values and meanings we want to encourage. We have already noted that landscape design can function in different ways, from a technology of division and alienation to one of reconciliation and harmony. What is true of landscape in general is equally and pointedly true of the garden. Indeed, the garden may be considered a microcosm of the world as it is understood by the culture in which it is located. It can also function as a model of experience that we may strive to emulate.

The observational landscape

The observational landscape is the most familiar. It has both etymology and tradition on its side. 'Landscape' began as a technical term used by painters and its origins are embodied in the observational landscape. We see this in the common practice of regarding the garden as a visual object, set apart and bounded by walls, fences, hedges, or borders, like the frame of a painting. These enclose the scene just as painters and photographers compose their images, so that it can be ‘taken in at a glance from one point of view’. What does this tell us about the garden or, more generally, about landscape? Not only that it should be objectified and experienced visually but that it is stationary (or at least that we are). Thus the observational garden resembles a conceptual object more than a natural one, and a glance is all that is needed to grasp it.

Many features in the design of cities, buildings, and gardens in the Western architectural tradition embody the observational landscape. Symmetrical structures and regularity of
fenestration and decorative features are common in architectural design. Straight paths, allées, city grids, squares, traffic circles, and other geometrical shapes appeal to the eye and mind. Although linear vistas can have a powerful dramatic effect and even incite an impulse to proceed down them, that motive is often short-lived when the distance is of any great length. Such vistas tend more often to arrest our movement and invite a contemplative gaze; the visual terminus quickly replaces the physical one and the visitor turns off in other, more curious directions. Since we can see far into the distance, walking becomes redundant, for it would merely repeat what the eye has already registered. Passive observation tends to be a common response to monumental buildings sited on a hill or escarpment as if they were great sculptures on a pedestal. It is encouraged by observation platforms that offer a panoramic view (if the air is clear enough to see far), just as scenic overlooks provide a panoramic vista for highway travelers. Formal garden designs tend to have a similar effect. Gravel paths separating carefully edged beds, often geometrical in shape; viewing terraces bounded by a railing and overlooking the garden, a grand allée extending a formal axis that divides the landscape – all these objectify the garden landscape and turn it into a contemplative object. These patterns are so familiar and hallowed by tradition that they have become the aesthetic standard for architecture and design in the West. They exemplify the dominance of the distant eye and are eminently suited to the culture of objectification they express so eloquently.

The observational landscape, moreover, is largely static, and often so is the observer. Movement and change in the landscape are not significant as the scene is arrayed in its completeness before the viewer. Of course most gardens now not only allow but encourage the visitor to walk through them. Yet even when the garden path is laid out to lead one along a predetermined route, as occurs in the English emblematic and painterly gardens of the first half of the eighteenth century, the visitor is encouraged to regard each scene as an object of contemplation, to be seen in the light of its mythological, religious, or personal references. The viewer stands apart as a spectator or interpretive reader of the scene, like the picturesque traveler who views the charms of the countryside through a Claude glass. Movement is essentially
incidental, a means to the contemplative regard of a succession of objectified scenes. With the garden as with the rest of the world, social as well as natural, a separation, both physical and psychological, lies between the observer and what is observed.

All this reflects the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, of subject and object, a separation whose influence is still powerful. Its roots lie deep in the classical tradition of contemplative knowledge, and its branches of political individualism strain for light and air in the urban mass and creeping sprawl of subrubia. The social consequences of this ideal are likely to be displacement, isolation, alienation, competition, and conflict. Landscape design thus has more than an aesthetic significance; it constructs a human environment. Such dualistic thinking is not an exclusively European tradition but can be found in other cultures. It resembles, for example, the distinction between self or atman and a real, material world made by Indian philosophers, in particular the two Nyaya philosophers, Udayana and Gangesha.\(^8\)

The presence of the Cartesian attitude is so powerful and deep in the West that it has become enshrined in our vocabulary and we have no language with which to express easily and clearly other ways of conceiving things. The ordinary world we live in is a Newtonian world of absolute time and absolute space, of discrete objects governed by impersonal forces whose influence is formulated in wholly abstract mathematical laws. It is the materialist world of science and industry; the manipulative world of engineers, politicians, economists and businessmen; the exploitative world in which forests are cleared and minerals extracted from the earth; and also the world of improved living conditions, control of diseases, and increased life expectancy. It is the world of space exploration, but it is also the world of nuclear arms, ethnic and religious conflicts, expanding deserts, hunger, homelessness, the extinction of numerous species, the spoliation of the environment, the profligate destruction of natural resources, and the irretrievable alteration of the earth's surface and atmosphere. Some take refuge in Eastern philosophy and mysticism, others in drugs, in New Age thinking and art, or in revealed religion. These responses are all different, to be sure, but they represent a subjective alternative to the depersonalizing objectification in the materialist ethos of science and industrial technology. Both
directions, materialism and subjectivism, are direct consequences of the dualistic division of the human world.

Aesthetic engagement with the landscape

Yet this is not the only world. I ascribe the observational landscape to the industrialized West because it is the dominant Western mode. But it is not the world of the poet nor is it the world of those peoples who live harmoniously with the earth and with each other. And it is not, I believe, the world we experience most directly, most immediately, and most intimately. Alternative traditions exist and their influence is increasing. Over the past half century, people have turned increasingly to other ways of thinking that offer a more conciliatory understanding of the human place in the natural world. Among them are Taoism and its vision of living in harmony with nature, the Native American tradition of a continuity between one's body and the land, and the Aboriginal belief that everything in nature is equally sacred. Although these traditions differ from one another, they share a sense of the fundamental and inviolable continuity of the human being with the natural world and its processes. They do not represent a reconciliation of human and nature but the recognition that there is no division between them. We may discover here a certain consanguinity with the ancient and still widespread animistic belief in a vital quality that pervades both animate and inanimate nature.

I should like to consider all such ways of understanding humans as active participants in a naturalistic context as forms of engagement. This term expresses more clearly what the previous chapters called the participatory or contextual model of environmental experience. ‘Engagement’ is a useful word because it contrasts clearly with the observational ideal that in various forms has dominated Western thought since the Renaissance. The difference between objectifying nature and engaging with nature is more than a contrast of traditions or alternative philosophical understandings: It is a difference in basic ways of experiencing the world.

Each of the many modes of human activity generates its characteristic form of
engagement in such various pursuits as social, political, economic, religious, intellectual, or practical ones. When the emphasis is on the perceptual content of that intimate participation, on the sensory qualities of that experience, the engagement may be called aesthetic. There is no single, uniform, or rigid standard to which each instance of engagement must conform. Different gradations of closeness and force occur in all the various modes of human involvement. At the same time, the continuity that characterizes each context is what allows us to identify it as engagement.

The aesthetic appreciation of nature and art stands among these forms. This is the aesthetic world, the world most real and most directly present to us. Aesthetic engagement recognizes the primacy of our immediate perceptual experience, experience that is sensory yet colored by the personal and cultural dimensions that enter into all human experience. Such diverse influences include education, personal biography, and biological and social conditions.

These are general comments, but they are useful for laying out our garden paths. Once we decide to take the engagement fork, many alternatives offer a rich array of possibilities. One, for example, might seem to be the choice between the path of art and the path of nature. Yet we have been taught by those who organize perceptual space, such as environmental artists, landscape painters, and landscape architects, not to distinguish too sharply between art and nature. At the same time, each art and each kind of environment exhibits distinctive characteristics, and particular instances of each of these are themselves unique embodiments. Surely aesthetic engagement in painting is not the same as it is in music or dance. Similarly, different landscape and garden traditions offer different qualities of engaged experience, and these are not equivalent. It would be unfortunate to try and force the French formal garden into the aesthetic mold of the English landscape garden. Each offers possibilities for aesthetic engagement that are distinctive yet rich. It may be enough to think of all these as arts in the broadest sense, the sense of skilled making, making that shapes perceptual experience with some degree of originality and some touch of creativity to make it salient and valuable. All the arts are part of this world of aesthetic engagement, from the so-called fine arts to the crafts and practical arts and to
participation with uncultivated nature through walking, hiking, camping, and boating.

In an architectural aesthetics of engagement, a building is not set apart as a massive, monumental edifice, imposing and overwhelming. Rather, it joins the landscape in some way, its forms mirroring the shapes of the landscape. A garden, like a building, is a coalescence of culture in material form. While many people habitually adopt an observational approach to gardens, as they do to architecture and other kinds of landscapes, gardens are more difficult than most landscapes to keep at arm's length. Aesthetic engagement takes many forms here and in ways that are not vague or mystical but definite and identifiable. Each garden tradition suggests its own manner of engagement. The English emblematic garden differs from the cottage garden and the landscape garden, the Chinese from the Japanese, the Japanese stroll garden from the dry garden, the Italian from the French formal garden. Yet at the same time, each of these forms expresses in its own way the poetic nature of aesthetic engagement.12

That is not to say that a garden, in whatever tradition, is invariably a place of tranquility, a refuge from the pressures of industrial urban life. Gardens may serve other purposes that are not primarily aesthetic, such as utility or religious contemplation. But even when perceptual experience and its meanings dominate, gardens may not be entirely benign. Sometimes they elicit overtones of danger, as in the maze garden. Designing features such as elevated walkways, narrow paths, and stepping stones across water may elicit feelings of apprehension or danger. These color our engagement with practical as well as aesthetic interest and both concerns demand close perceptual involvement from the visitor.

An aesthetic of engagement not only connects people to the landscape; it awakens a magnetic attraction between them. A landscape that is fully engaging does not consist of set pieces that we should view respectfully as tourists. Rather, it transforms the casual observer into an inhabitant. Arbors and gateways in a garden have different influences on the body as we pass through. Shape and scale become strong factors. Oversize portals may impress the beholder but they also are intimidating, while low lintels press down on the body and may make us feel that we need to stoop in order to pass under. Moving through an arched doorway does not feel
the same as walking through a rectangular one, and a Japanese tori and a key-hole doorway into a Chinese garden are different still. A Chinese moon-viewing pavilion pressing out over the water invites contemplation, yet it is evocative reflection from inside the environment, not disinterested contemplation from a removed distance. The same is true of vantage points along the path of a Japanese stroll garden, a form of engagement that offers the visitor contrasting perceptions to the succession of views in the intimate discovery of a bamboo water trough or a stone lantern hidden in the foliage. Even the dry garden of Ryoan-ji gently coaxes the visitor to move, since one of its fifteen stones always remains hidden wherever one stands on the viewing veranda.13

What is true of the design of structures applies equally to the design of spaces. Paths and roadways whose curves and dips respond to the contours of the topography appeal to the body more than those that press heedlessly forward in straight lines and on level planes. An allée or straight path tends to discourage movement, since one can easily see what lies ahead, while curved walkways invite one to move forward. Plantings that soften geometrical forms help humanize an outdoor space. The attraction of small details and small spaces may cause one to bend, sit, or squat. We sense with our entire bodies; not just with our eyes but with our ears, skin, legs, and muscles. Sacrificing immediate visual clarity and order may be a welcome price to pay for the somatic appeal of indeterminacy and discovery.

The same difference between observation and engagement can be found in landscapes on a larger scale. Arrow-straight avenues and the grid pattern are models of visual clarity and intellectual order and have dominated urban design in the West, just as survey grids have standardized topography and transformed much of the countryside into exchangeable pieces on a checkerboard. This is familiar enough and the advantages are obvious: immediate recognition, clear direction, convenient manipulation, and impersonal exploitation. But there is a loss, too. The order and scale of such an ordered environment obscure uniqueness and difference. They expand the scope of an environment beyond the limits of sight so that the human body is lost in the vastness. No mystery remains and, with everything exposed, curiosity disappears, as well. In
the extreme case, an observational landscape can lead to immobility: Since everything is revealed at a glance, there is little reason to press forward.

The landscape of engagement functions very differently. As the curves in a river entice the paddler to push ahead, a winding walkway beckons the pedestrian onward to see what lies beyond the next bend. A curving highway has a similar effect on the driver, drawing one forward while at the same time slowing the speed of the vehicle. Designing the landscape, whether garden or city, so that we move together with it requires creative imagination. No ready formula can provide a prescribed solution. This is actually an advantage, for it offers an alternative to the standardized, objectified places of an impersonal, homogeneous environment, as in the anonymous and interchangeable commercial strips and malls that surround American cities, or the ready-made landscaping of arbor vitae and juniper that surround every McDonald's. The tent village of a nomadic group and the Indian trail through the forest or along the bank of a river take their form out of need and use joined to the configuration of the landscape. These manifestations of the human body moving in and with the landscape are a reminder of how engaged design can work, and they provide one model for the garden.

**Two paths through the landscape**

The observational landscape and the landscape of engagement are, then, two different meanings of landscape and they generate two conceptions of design and two very different kinds of experience. Of course, in practice few landscapes can remain exclusively observational. Most lie somewhere between these two models and develop under the influence of political, economic, social, cultural, and historical forces. Yet each landscape tends to encourage one or the other of these alternative modes of experience and to different degrees. Further, these two meanings of landscape represent different conceptions of the human world and lead to different kinds of environmental experiences.

They are the first fork of our garden path. Which direction we choose will lead us either
into the garden as an engaged participant or along its periphery as an observer. On the one extreme, a maze garden is heavily participatory, for it is the visitor's movement that activates its peculiar charm of search, discovery, and resolution. On the other extreme, a formal garden provides a strongly visual appeal, delighting in the gratifications of symmetry, balance, order, and control. To view the garden at Versailles from the king's chamber is to achieve the pinnacle of observational power, epitomizing the Sun God, who from this point surveyed his orderly, geometrical Eden. Like Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, this human god exemplifies utter stasis. However, when we descend the broad steps from the wide plaza in front of the palace and stroll along the paths, the formalism of suspended equilibrium is transformed into a dynamic geometry, a kaleidoscope of moving forms.

But we cannot speak of design alone, as if this were the entire determinant of the character of a landscape. Our attitude and understanding reciprocate with the garden. The willingness to descend from a god's eye viewpoint and become a participant, to enter actively into a relationship with the landscape and to collaborate with its features, contributes to the process of aesthetic engagement. This resembles the Ming description of those who can see the mountain from a viewing hall: ‘They take hold of what is crucial in order to view its mysterious wonder. They obtain one [aspect of a] thing and encompass a hundred more. Everything that they receive with their eyes they would meet in their hearts’.14

Once we start down this garden path, we can easily engage with the garden. We can even think of the garden as the embodiment of motion. For the primary motion of the visitor is echoed in the reciprocal motion of the landscape. Shapes, masses, colors, and composition move in continuous rearrangement. Even as one pauses to survey the scene, the roving eye projects us outward over the lake or lawns and into the configurations of plantings, rocks, and more distant terrain. How these landscape features are shaped and placed guides our passage into the landscape, just as the painter leads the eye into the space of the canvas.

Gardens represent the central truth of landscape. However we fashion a garden, however we build our landscapes, whether by deliberate design or haphazard action, we cannot help
inhabiting them. Even the observational garden, insofar as it has some connection with human habitation, may be, in some larger sense, engaged. We are unavoidably in the landscape, moving through the landscape, an active part of it.

It is important to recognize this ultimate engagement and to design with it in mind. On occasions when the observational model might seem appropriate, we can still engage the landscape to some degree: the view across a lake, the distant prospect using a borrowed landscape, or the contemplative serenity of a monastery garden. Then there are gardens that demand our close attention to intimate detail and our active participation, such as the Japanese stroll garden. Perhaps the difference in these models lies as much with the visitor as with the garden, with the attitudes and expectations one brings to environmental experience. Recognizing these differences helps us realize how a garden aesthetic embodies an understanding of the human place in the world. Culture has a great deal to do with this understanding, as do education and experience. Nonetheless, design can coax the visitor into close involvement. It can invite participation and entice one into active engagement. It can teach the body how to live.

This, then, is the challenge of garden design, an aesthetic challenge but at the same time a social one. We can design an object or we can design a place. We can distance the world as an impersonal location whose interest is entirely utilitarian, a world of strip developments and shopping malls. But we can also form an understanding that envisions the world as a human place that encloses us, as our home.

To recognize that the living body is an active participant in the landscape, to integrate the body's dynamic force with the forces of the land and its features, is to humanize the world and naturalize the human. Here is where the garden offers us not only an oasis from the impersonality and objectivity of the industrialized environment but a model for its design. Borges's maze garden was a metaphor for the intricate possibilities eternally present in a fictitious novel. Our garden of forking paths is a virtual garden, an overlay on the world we make for ourselves. Which fork shall we choose as we start down that garden path?
NOTES


2 ‘In gardening, a labyrinth or maze means an intricate network of pathways enclosed by hedges of which it is difficult to find the center or exit. It is a descendant of the old geometrical style of gardening. The more common kind consists of walks, formerly called alleys, kept to an equal width by parallel hedges, which should be too close and thick for the eye readily to penetrate them. The task is to get to the center, marked in some conspicuous way, then to return....’ Britannica CD 97, ‘Labyrinth’.


4 Def. 2 in The Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), p.54. Def. 3 offers a generalized version of definitions 1 and 2 as: ‘Inland natural scenery, or its representation in painting’.


6 OED, loc. cit.


9 Chinese Taoism has the concept of tzu-jan or ‘naturalness’, which is living in complete harmony with the forces of nature. It idealizes the simple, spontaneous life that accepts the unalterable cycle of nature and strives to bring one's existence into full accord with the natural process.


12 What Tuan writes of the Chinese garden is even more pronounced in the Japanese: ‘The garden is not designed to give the visitor a certain number of privileged views; seeing is an aesthetic and intellectual activity that puts a distance between the object and the observer. The garden is designed to involve, to encompass the visitor who, as he walks along a winding trail, is exposed to constantly shifting scenes.’ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia, A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 138. For a comprehensive treatment of aesthetic engagement, see A. Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) and *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

13 The placement of the stones is designed to encourage contemplation and the viewer's contribution is needed to discover their meaning. It is possible to transport oneself imaginatively into the garden and transform the scene into any size as, for example, changing the stones into islands.

Chapter IV
THE WILDERNESS CITY:
A STUDY OF METAPHORICAL EXPERIENCE

Metaphor and the city

From its very beginnings, reflection on the city has had a mixed outcome. Some have praised the city as an oasis of civilization in a desert of intellectual darkness and rigid custom. Others have condemned it for breeding instability, alienation, licentiousness, and crime. As a social phenomenon, the city in history has been all these and more. It has been a center of commerce, education, and culture; a locus of change and freedom; a patron of architecture, design, and the other arts. At the same time, the city has sown false hopes, spawned squalor and despair, and made possible new and more powerful forms of social control and violence. By concentrating population, it has energized culture and the arts, abetted the self-consciousness and conflict of social classes, and, in the modern age, led to the emergence of ‘mass man’ and mass culture.

The language by which we characterize the city reflects the same ambivalence, and metaphors have eloquently expressed its diverse faces. The city may be an cultural oasis, a hub of commerce, the citadel of government, and the fount of civilization. No single metaphor for urbanism provides a complete picture; rather, each reflects one facet of a complex phenomenon. Some figures suggest optimistic possibilities and express ideals for urban design. The ‘garden city’ conveys a fusion of nature and society, a cultivated nature in which control takes a quietly benevolent course in promoting the flowering of people’s lives in an Edenic urban setting. The ‘forest city’, beloved of Finland’s planners, defers to natural imperatives more respectfully, seeing urban success less in controlling nature than in envisioning a harmonious collaboration in which the forest is a benign setting for human habitation. The ‘machine city’ reflects the technocratic goal of subjugating nature, imposing the ‘rational’ human imprint on the landscape through what Victor Hugo called ‘the somber sadness of right angles’: survey grids, street grids,
The ‘asphalt jungle’ conveys the vicious urban social patterns that emerge in predatory gangs, gratuitous violence, and the venal exploitation of the weak. To this perhaps Calvino's ‘invisible cities’ offer an antidote in the region of imagination and fantasy.

All these metaphors are true, for all convey aspects of urban life and the multiple conditions and experiences that cities offer. Each metaphor both captures something of the city and creates a greater understanding of it. To make such a claim, however, does not settle the issue but only raises it anew: For what is metaphor and how does it function? Even though metaphor is almost as common a subject of discussion as it is an object of use, it remains elusive. Perhaps we can best explore the first by examining the second, hoping to grasp something of the special quality of metaphorical thinking by probing into the way it works in a particular case.

This inquiry into the aesthetic of the city has, then, two objectives. One is to explore the dimension of urban life suggested by a still different metaphor, ‘wilderness’, hoping to discover what distinctive vision of urban life the ‘wilderness city’ can provide. The other is to use this investigation to uncover something about the meaning and function of metaphor — more exactly, of metaphorical experience.

Wilderness as a metaphor for the city

The meaning of 'wilderness' has a long and varied history. The shift in its connotation from a dark and dangerous place that fills one with foreboding to one of adventure, discovery, and even exhilaration and awe began in earnest in the West during the eighteenth century. Over the past hundred years, 'wilderness' has acquired a still more positive connotation, becoming a place to be protected and preserved, a source of value and of human connections with the natural world. When the wilderness metaphor is applied to urban experience, however, the word reverts to its earlier, forbidding sense of a trackless domain uninhabited by humans.

Wilderness differs in curious ways from the comparable metaphors of garden and forest. Unlike these, which convey cultivation and collaboration with nature, wilderness is a dark metaphor. Instead of elevating or romanticizing the city, wilderness makes it an ominous place
and evokes a feeling of apprehension. The effectiveness of this metaphor may actually lie in its very obscurity and ambivalence: Working inversely, it illuminates the city through its very darkness. To the extent that regarding the city as wilderness tells us something about it that we might not obtain in other ways, the metaphor is useful. To the extent that it tells us something about ourselves, it may be even more useful. I find wilderness to have both such values, and in a rather unexpected way.

Thinking of the city as wilderness leads us in unusual directions. We may, at times, consider the city overwhelming and hostile, not a place for preserving and promoting humane values. When unfamiliar, the city may appear confusing, threatening in its very strangeness. However, these traits are more recognizable, even acceptable, when the city's features are seen as analogous to those of a wilderness, some of which may be benign, others less so. For example, one can find a parallel between the momentary respite from immersion in the density of a city or wilderness either by the panoramic view from the observation deck of a skyscraper or a broad boulevard, or by the sweeping panorama one might obtain from a mountain top, a bluff, or a tall tree. The aroma emanating from a bakery or a restaurant may remind one of the odors of different vegetation or ground surfaces, such as a meadow, pine needles, or wet soil. The odor of decaying leaves or the effluvium of a marsh in the hot sun may resemble the smell of garbage containers on the sidewalk awaiting pickup or the exhaust of motor vehicles. Moving among buildings and along streets has some of the perceptual quality of walking among stands of trees and around dense growth. The background hum of traffic may remind one the wind rushing ceaselessly through the trees when a weather front is coming through. Pushing one's way through a crowd resembles the experience of pressing through thick vegetation. Constant alertness influences our passage through both city and wilderness, while the background apprehension of danger from motor vehicles and muggers parallels the constant threat, real or imagined, from the deadly creatures thought to inhabit a wilderness. In both city and wilderness, feeling out of place is a vivid component of the experience. With familiarity, the wilderness city may change into something different, such as a park or a jungle. The last of these finds common ground between
tribal warfare and the urban dangers of gang wars. As a metaphor, wilderness preserves its darkness.

For metaphors embody values. They are judgments just as much when hidden behind figurative language as when they are displayed openly. When traffic becomes fearsome and urban crime endemic, the city is described as a jungle, a metaphorical judgment of condemnation. Generally, it seems, when the city is compared with nature or the countryside, it comes out behind. From Aesop (‘Better beans and bacon in peace than cakes and ale in fear’\(^{11}\)) through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (‘God the first garden made, and the first city Cain’,\(^{12}\) and ‘God made the country, and man made the town’\(^{13}\), the city has usually been regarded as fearful and dangerous, a place to be shunned in favor of the peace and safety of the countryside. For when untrammelled nature is tamed into a garden, it is no longer frightening but a setting for gentle pleasures preferable to city life.

The wilderness environment does not stand apart from the rest of nature. It has no ontological status, but neither is it a neutral object. What we identify and understand by wilderness are cultural meanings whose significance holds only for the culture in which we participate. So, too, as we have noted, is the idea of wilderness historically conditioned, changing in the eighteenth century from a wild place, haunted by darkness, danger, and desolation, to one where we can encounter, admire, and enjoy nature. This transformation in meaning is part of a process that still continues, as we reconfigure nature from a threat into a resource, from a source of wealth into a haven of respite from the pressures of urban life, from a playground into a domain demanding respect for its own inherent values.

**Metaphorical reciprocity**

One might expect the wilderness metaphor to offer a better understanding of the city by seeing it as a reconstructed, rationalized wilderness, interpreting the city, that is, through that image, though one somewhat hidden behind a coating of civility. Yet oddly enough, the metaphorical
relation between city and wilderness seems to work in the opposite direction, as well: We may impose our sense of urban experience onto the meaning of wilderness and ascribe to it the fears and dangers we may feel in the city. Not without some reason did Shakespeare characterize Rome as a ‘wilderness of Tigers’, nor has that been the only city to figure in such descriptions. In this case, the city may be thought of as a metaphor for our cultural construction of wilderness. Once we enter into the metaphor, in fact, neither direction for developing its meaning seems independent of the other.

What insight does the wilderness metaphor have for the city? Like any metaphor, it enlarges experience by expanding its connections and reference. The metaphor of wilderness helps us grasp urban experience in a way that is the clearer for being articulated in this fashion. Urban experience becomes more understandable, if not more congenial, by being seen as exhibiting the hostile, dangerous, dark traits of wilderness. In spite of the fact that the meaning of wilderness is a cultural construction, it nonetheless helps us grasp the experience of the city, that ultimate cultural artifact. To consider the city a trackless region uninhabited by humans is, of course, literally false, yet from the standpoint of experience it may be singularly accurate. With its endless extent, enormous structures, and mammoth scale, the city overpowers its small and fragile inhabitants. Cars and trucks dominate its hard pavements; geometrical patterns decree the layout of streets and sidewalks, their distances unwalkable. Such traits render the city hostile to the passage of the human body. In the uncaring impersonality of the big city, the lonely, lost lives of many of its dwellers, and its blatant aggressiveness and masked cruelty, the city thwarts humane feeling. Grasped through the wilderness metaphor, the city ceases to be the fount of freedom and flower of culture we thought it was. Behind the veneer of customs, conventions, and institutions we discover the raw harshness and brutality of wilderness.

At the same time and conversely, the plausibility of the wilderness metaphor comes from our experience of the city. Urban experience reappears in the meaning of wilderness. The metaphor tells us what we think about the city: that it is not a haven of safety but a place of danger, not the center of civilization but a maelstrom that consumes it. Wilderness becomes here
the underlying, identifying image of urban experience. Moreover, in proposing that civilization lies merely on the surface, the metaphor leads us to rethink the meaning of civilization, itself. It encourages us to reconsider not only our values but our mode of life. One is reminded of the practice of the Chinese literati. As depicted in many paintings, these officials in retirement left the court cities to live in a natural setting and follow the more civilized pursuits of entertaining friends, drinking rice wine, and writing poetry. For them it was not the city that is the seat of culture but the countryside, perhaps even the wilderness. Understood in this way, then, the city becomes not the opposite of wilderness but its double: Wilderness is not only a metaphor for the city but its mirror.

Thus the wilderness city possesses reciprocal meanings. The alien and hostile conditions we see in wilderness tell us something about the city. At the same time, we project our experience of the city onto our understanding of wilderness, turning wilderness into a reflection of our sense of urban life. The terms in this figurative equation, then, have no independent meaning. Metaphor, here and perhaps elsewhere, as well, embodies reciprocity: Not only does wilderness become a metaphor for the city, but the city also becomes a metaphor for wilderness.

The rhetorical use of wilderness has, in fact, an ironic twist, for wilderness as a natural environment exists more in history and imagination than in fact. With the destruction of most of the primeval forests, what we have left is only what we call, oxymoronically, ‘wilderness parks’. These are usually secondary ‘wildernesses’, land allowed to grow over only after the earlier logging and farming activities have ceased to be profitable and have been abandoned. And these wildernesses are cultivated in the sense of being protected, often managed, and always surrounded and impinged upon by human activities. Perhaps, in a similar fashion, the primeval wilderness has been overgrown in human experience by the city. The metaphor suggests that the city has become the new wilderness evoking, on the one hand, feelings of intimidation and awe, a sense of the infinite, and the experience of absolute dependency; and on the other, danger and the wild, behavioral traits of hostility, aggression, and violence.
A role for metaphor

There is still more at work here than reciprocity, for metaphor has an implicit advocacy role. When we speak of a garden city, we are not merely using a figurative expression: We are extolling the garden as a model for urban life and a qualitative goal of urban design. Similarly, the forest city urges an integration with nature in designing our cities, not just by including gardens and parks but in both retaining and planting stands of large trees in close proximity with apartment complexes and shopping centers. The machine city presents a contrary model, glorying in human ingenuity, in engineering solutions to the problems involved in housing and servicing large concentrations of human activity. These metaphors have a rhetorical function, then, giving poetic force to an implied program for urban design.

The wilderness city has not, to my knowledge, been taken as such a model. It stands not as a goal but as a graphic expression of anguish at what urban experience has become for many less fortunate inhabitants of the modern city. As the positive meanings of wilderness become accepted more widely, this urban metaphor may lose its critical force. Possibly the values of respect for environment and other forms of life might help develop similar values in city living. I am not sanguine about such a change.

There is another, equally normative use of the wilderness metaphor, for the wilderness city also plays into the hands of the apologists for exploitation and selective advantage. The metaphor can be used not only to criticize the quality of urban life but to justify behavior some want to encourage in the market economy of mass society. There are those who advocate competitive and aggressive behavior, who find safety in anonymity, and who utilize the tensions in watchfulness, suspicion, and hostility as stimuli to acquisitive striving. If the wilderness metaphor should lose its force or be co-opted by the advocates of its traditional features, critics of urban ills will have to search for another, more telling image to give rhetorical force to their grievances. A new metaphor will have to be fashioned to do the work of the old wilderness.
A function of metaphor

Finally, can the wilderness metaphor tell us anything about metaphor in general? One thing this discussion has shown is that the terms of an effective metaphor are not discrete meanings that are simply related through this linguistic figure. Rather, they work together in complex ways, each informing the other, so that the meaning of the terms within the metaphor is not independent of the metaphor but rather is created by it. 'City' and 'wilderness' are not simple linguistic entities but complexes of historical and social meanings. Out of their juxtaposition emerges an awareness that extends well beyond the meaning each of the words originally carried. Reciprocity differs from interactionism, the theory that one begins the metaphor with words whose meanings are antecedently fixed but influence each other in the metaphor.\textsuperscript{16} Joining the words in a metaphor changes the terms because it alters their very meanings. There is more here than a linguistic form of the Hegelian dialectic, in which the metaphor synthesizes the meaning each term introduces separately. The meaning of 'wilderness' changes when juxtaposed with 'city’, and conversely, so that one can no longer speak of their prior significance in accounting for their function in the metaphorical expression.

Change occurs in still another way, for we have to consider metaphor not just as a linguistic complex but as one that functions within a socio-linguistic situation. Meanings do not stand apart from the holders of those meanings, and people use language in a setting that is always historically and socially changing. Metaphors, then, introduce and participate in that dynamic human context and they cannot be extrapolated from it, either as individual terms or as tropes, without irreparable distortion.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, as makers and users of metaphor, we do not stand outside and apart from their meanings. We construct them through our feelings, experiences, and behavior, as well as through our cognition.

My last and perhaps most curious observation brings together these others. For if the terms in a metaphor are not independent objects, if a metaphorical expression is not a self-contained meaning but joins with its users in a cultural context, it follows that an effective
metaphor creates something new. We not only construct an understanding out of established words but create new meanings, meanings that extend, moreover, beyond linguistic limits to embody historical, somatic, affective, behavioral, and imaginative dimensions, all embedded in the life of a culture. Metaphor thus implicates a complex theory of meaning, most aspects of which are submerged below its linguistic tip. And the wilderness city with which we began has become more than we can say, perhaps even in the language of metaphor.
NOTES


2 ‘The city is a fact in nature, like a cave, a run of mackerel or an ant-heap. But it is also a conscious work of art, and it holds within its communal framework many simpler and more personal forms of art. Mind takes form in the city; and in turn, urban forms condition mind’. Lewis Mumford, The Culture of Cities, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1938), Introduction. ‘Living in cities is an art, and we need the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe the peculiar relationship between man and material that exists in the continual creative play of urban living. The city as we imagine it, then, soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, and nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate on maps in statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture.’ Jonathan Raban, Soft City, (New York: Dutton, 1974), Ch. 1.

3 ‘Just as language has no longer anything in common with the thing it names, so the movements of most of the people who live in cities have lost their connexion with the earth; they hang, as it were, in the air, hover in all directions, and find no place where they can settle.’ Rainer Maria Rilke, Worpswede (1903; repr. in Rodin and Other Prose Pieces, 1954). ‘I live not in myself, but I become/ Portion of that around me; and to me/High mountains are a feeling, but the hum/ Of human cities torture.’ Lord Byron, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (1812), cto. 3, st. 72. And, most pointedly, ‘Prepare for death, if here at night you roam,/ And sign your will before you sup from home’. Samuel Johnson, ‘London’.


5 Munkkiniemi was the earliest of these planned forest communities. Tapiola, later, gained international prominence and was widely imitated.

6 Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus exemplify this aesthetic: ‘We want an architecture adapted to
our world of machines, radios and fast motor cars, an architecture whose function is clearly recognizable in the relation of its forms’. ‘Every architect must understand the significance of the city in order to be able to engage actively in city planning; he must recognize “simplicity in multiplicity” as a guiding principle in the shaping of its character. Form elements of typical shape should be repeated in series’. Walter Gropius, ‘The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus’, in Bauhaus 1919-1928, ed. Herbert Bayer, Walter Gropius, Ise Gropius (Charles T. Branford Co., 1959), pp. 27, 28. Frank Lloyd Wright observed that the steel and glass skyscraper is a mechanical building, a ‘machine pure and simple’.


8 Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities (Harcourt Brace Jovannovich, 1974).


10 Holmes Rolston III, Philosophy Gone Wild (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1989), pp.118-143.

11 Aesop, ‘The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse’.

12 Abraham Cowley (1618-1667), ‘Of Solitude’, II.


14 ‘...dost thou not perceive / That Rome is but a wilderness of Tigers?’, Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, III, i, 54.

16 See Hausman, *Metaphor and Art*, p. 31 and *passim*.

17 ‘Metaphors create integrated wholes that generate more than linguistic items and are something more than conceptual perspectives’. Hausman, *Metaphor and Art*, p. 45.
Chapter V

AN AESTHETICS OF THE COASTAL ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

When we think of environment, what is likely to come to mind depends a great deal on who we are and where our interests lie. We may envision a bucolic scene of farm country, with rolling hills, cultivated fields, and perhaps a herd of grazing cows or a flock of sheep to complete the picture. To an inveterate urban dweller, on the other hand, environment may evoke the image of bustling city life, with skyscrapers, streets filled with cars, trucks, and buses, sidewalks busy with pedestrians, all the color, noise, and dynamic pulse of a metropolis. These positive pictures also have their obverse side. It is not difficult for an environmental critic to cite regions of rural poverty, with ramshackle farmhouses surrounded by household debris and wrecked vehicles, or hills denuded by clear-cutting, whose streams flow dark with the spoils of erosion. Not only has the countryside been desecrated: Industry has invaded the city with industrial sites, acrid smoke, chemical odors, and their accompaniment of slums, sweatshops, and despair.

All these images of environment, whether appealing or repugnant, have something in common. They are centered on the relatively stable, static foundation of the land. Whether barren or dense with growth, cultivated or layered with concrete and asphalt, solid ground underpins all these images. We humans are incurably anthropocentric, constructing our world from the standpoint of our own favored position. Yet that is not the sole possibility. Approximately three-fourths of the earth's surface is covered by water, and most of the world's population lives on the margins of the land close to it. Further, water is a universal bond, its unbroken surface connecting the coastlines of every continent and penetrating deep within.

Buckminster Fuller once wrote a wonderfully suggestive essay called ‘Fluid Geography’ in which he adopted the unusual perspective of regarding the shore as the edge of the water instead of the boundary of the land, as we usually do. What would our sense of environment be
like if we adopted the water as our point of orientation? What would it show us about environment — in particular about environmental experience — that we would not be likely to discover from a terrestrial base?

**Locating the coast**

Water is not an alien substance. Not only is it essential for all life: Its practical importance is manifold and it occupies an important place in human history and traditions, including philosophical ones. As far back as the ancient Greeks, water played a significant role in understanding the natural world. Thales, who lived during the 6th century B.C.E. in Miletus in what is now Turkey and who is generally credited to be the first to engage in philosophical speculation, considered water to be the basic substance of the natural world. This is not so strange a choice, inasmuch as water is found nearly everywhere and in nearly everything, and is capable of an endless variety of transformations of form, density, and perceptual characteristics. Moreover, the Greek word for matter, *hylǝ*, literally means 'timber,' specifically, a ship's timber. This may have some bearing on why the Pythagoreans thought of the universe as a ship. Aristotle, himself, gave marine biology a significant place among his wide range of interests. The importance of water, the original life environment, has continued to the present day in many diverse scientific disciplines and research institutes, numerous industries and commercial activities, and, not least, in poetry, fiction, music, and painting. Human civilization has never lost its bond with the aqueous world.

The coast is where large land masses meet the water. Here the world's great rivers join the oceans and most of its great cities stand, cities whose harbors are centers of world trade. Even the ships that trade among the ports of a country along the margins of the land are called coasters. Coastal communities, great and small, are oriented toward the water and were originally reached by water. It is not surprising, then, that water is sometimes considered to be the foundation of civilization, even though it is, curiously enough, a fluid foundation.
Exactly how to identify the coast is not obvious. We may consider it an edge, the edge of the land. We may regard it, contrariwise, as the edge of the sea. We may think of it as a boundary, the dividing line between land and sea. Again, we may see the coast as the shore, the seashore, the tidal zone between land and sea. Inspired by Kierkegaard, we may think of it as simply between, yet still a place (topos), or as suggesting both closure and opening. Precision is elusive here.

Furthermore, such characterizations of the coast, though plausible, are not consistent with one another. Emulating Kant, we may regard them as antinomies, antinomies of the coast. Thus the coast is (1) both an edge and a boundary. Yet an edge is the outside limit of an plane regarded from the standpoint of that area ( -- >| ), while a boundary defines the limit of an area from the outside ( |<-- ). Again, the coast is (2) both a line, as on a map, and a zone. It is a line in the sense of the exact point at which the land ends and the water begins, and it is a zone, such as the intertidal zone, a broad band with its own identity and characteristics. Moreover, if we consider the coast to be a zone, an area in its own right, it may be (3) both a region and a shore. As a shore we might consider the coast as an area defined by its outer limits, its edges, i.e. its high and low tide lines, or as a band defined by its center area without definite edges, since these are constantly changing. As a region, the coast may extend well inland to encompass communities situated along that periphery, while reaching far out to sea, it might include the continental shelf and territorial waters. Finally, (4) while the land and the water both end at the coast, they do not stop, for both are continuous, the land under the water, and the water under the land. Yet this is a continuity conjoined with difference, since land and water differ as solid and liquid and as kinds of things with their own characteristic activities. Where, then, can we locate the coast beneath these layers of contradictions?

**Ideas of the coast**

Tradition, as we have noted, leads us to think of the seashore from the standpoint of the land. As
in paintings and photographs of the shore, we tend to depict it visually and usually from a
distance. And with distance comes its corollary, objectification. Seen from a distance, the shore
is objectified into a coast. This is true of nautical charts, too, for even though these depict the
shore from the standpoint of the water (a standpoint presumably from the deck of a vessel), it is
abstracted and objectified, even when, as in earlier charts, there may be drawings of harbor
entrances and notable landmarks. Removed from ourselves, the coast becomes a thing to be used,
even exploited, an object for tourism, an available natural resource, as in sand mining, or the
locus of scientific study.

Yet to take any environment as exclusively visual is misleading, for this isolates visual
sensibility from the other perceptual modes that accompany it. An environment taken visually,
moreover, induces a contemplative attitude, distancing ourselves from what we are seeing. It
encourages subjectivity, reducing our experience to an attitude or state of mind. And insofar as
our visual perception has an aesthetic intent, it narrows aesthetic value to a fragment of our
environmental experience. Whether deliberate or not, the traditional approach is limited at best
and, at worst, deceptive.

What would happen if we relinquished both experience that is primarily visual and an
orientation based on land? How can we conceive an aesthetics of the coast from the standpoint of
the water?

Even posing the question is not a simple matter. It is often remarked how visual
metaphors dominate the language we use to describe intellectual processes. Yet our position as
knowers is equally marked by metaphors of stasis and stability. To speak of the standpoint of the
land is reasonably clear, for we may indeed stand at a certain point on the land, even though we
rarely stand still for more than a fleeting moment. But how can we describe a water-based
approach? It is both odd and misleading to speak of the standpoint of the water, for not only can
we not stand on the water but we never occupy a fixed point on that mobile medium, even when
standing on a ship’s deck. Orienting ourselves in the coastal environment from the water forces
us to reconsider both our place in environment and its very nature.
The differences in perception from the water are striking. For one thing, we cannot easily
distance ourselves since, once the shore is perceptible, we become part of the coastal zone. Then,
our position is never completely stable but is constantly mobile, sometimes by slight undulations
or swinging but often by motions that abruptly change both our horizontal and vertical axes as
well as our specific location. Under such circumstances contemplation is hardly possible.
Furthermore, our experience is far from subjective but involves the position and movements of
the body, in addition to conscious processes. These differences force us to rethink how to
understand coastal aesthetics, and, more generally, how to understand environment. Water
discourages distancing in more than the extreme case of a storm at sea that Bullough cited.6

Another reason a visual approach is unsatisfactory is that any single sense is partial at
best. It offers only a narrow channel to what is a complex of experiential factors. A visual sense
of the coast has its uses, but these are limited. Surveying and cartography require a visual
approach, and we need it, too, for locating our position by cross-bearings in piloting or taking
sights in celestial navigation. If it is not redundant to say so, the visual sense also serves the
practical purposes of inspection.

Yet the sense of sight is inadequate for experiencing the coast because numerous factors
are involved that a visual approach cannot touch. Among these are our knowledge, beliefs, and
practices. Coastal experience is heavily influenced by the lore of those who practice fishing,
trading, and shipping, and of others who live from the fruits and commerce that the sea affords.
Their traditional beliefs and practices are embodied in the folklore, mythology, and literary
works that speak of the sea, of seafaring, of fishermen, ships, and coastal communities. There is
a culture of the sea that lives among those who dwell by, on, and from it. A vast body of
knowledge is further associated with the disciplines and institutions that deal with the scientific,
political, and economic aspects of the coast, all of which are subtly intertwined.

Most significant of all for environmental aesthetics are experiences we have when we
encounter the coast, and it is revealing to consider perceptual qualities that are not visual. The
sound of waves is a trademark of such experience. Walking along the strand is a favorite pastime
of visitors to the shore. The feel under one's feet of a boardwalk or of the sand and stones on a beach are powerful parts of perception and memory here. The touch of the sun on our skin, the wind blowing in our face or ruffling our hair make vivid impressions. Moreover, the way in which all these experiences are interconnected and continuous is particularly significant. The sea is never still, and just as active, too, is our perceptual involvement with it. This is a holistic experience that fully engages one — physically, intellectually, socially, and as part of human culture and history. Finally and of special significance is the fact that we humans are normative creatures and, as we become part of this environmental complex, we infuse that experience with our values. The environment of the coast is permeated with a multitude of values, economic, biological, and, of course, aesthetic.

Aesthetics of the coastal environment

Perceptual stimuli have great practical significance in the coastal environment, for humans inhabiting or even visiting the coast are particularly vulnerable to climate and weather. The importance of noting signs of change in sea and sky encourages a sensitivity to aesthetic qualities. Along with heightened awareness comes satisfaction in the synaesthetic fusion of all our sense modalities. This intensified sensibility readily leads to new and fresh perceptual awareness and to deeper perceptual understanding. The ever-changing sea creates ever-changing experiences, and our sensory capacities provide both delight and discovery, together with a special appreciation for what is distinctive and unique here. The aesthetic features we experience with every environment are especially prominent in the coastal environment. Light and shadow, color and texture, pattern and movement, space and mass are all directly present. Our perceptual involvement with these makes aesthetic appreciation an active process, a mutual exchange of action and response. The ordinary divisions and separations with which we distinguish and structure our environment melt into continuities. So thorough is this reciprocity that all the participating factors tend to blend into one another, giving a distinctive qualitative tone to
particular environments. We can characterize this process of intimate involvement as aesthetic engagement, a complete perceptual integration of all the factors in environmental experience.

While engagement is central to all aesthetic appreciation, the coastal environment points up features found in every environment and renders them particularly intense and vivid. Coastal perception is situated in a setting whose characteristic scale is neither intimate nor vast. Not only is distancing more difficult here, but our active involvement makes objectification perceptually impossible. Aesthetic engagement leads to appreciation that is not contemplative, not subjective, and not an exclusively mental act but an activity that requires bodily participation. Aesthetic awareness shifts constantly in a coastal environment, and because environmental features are mobile here, this makes perception fragile and ephemeral.

All this suggests how we may resolve the antinomies of the coast. These meaningful but contradictory ideas result from objectifying the coast, conceptualizing it by considering it from a distance and apart from the constitutive human presence. Taken in the contexts of different activities and purposes, however, the coast may be grasped and experienced both as an edge and a boundary, as a line and a zone, as a shore and a region, and as both continuous and different. These incompatibilities are conceptual, not experiential. Our perception changes with the kind of presence we have in the coastal environment, and what is logically incompatible becomes aesthetically accessible. Such a reconciliation is possible because an experienced environment is a complex of different but continuous factors that are fused perceptually. A strong sensory awareness predominates, but it is joined by cognitive elements, associated memories, and imaginative suggestions. All these add color and content to the normative qualities of that experience. Perceptual experience activates and integrates these diverse factors.

Environmental experience, we have observed, is always normative, and all values require a human presence. They are not an emergent feature but arise as part of our actions and responses. Thus values are always present, an inherent part of every environmental experience. Many different values pervade every environment — social values, economic and practical ones, scientific values, spiritual and aesthetic values — yet they combine into a strong, common
presence. Moreover, when we take these values in isolation, we fragment and therefore distort normative experience. For values are complex and interconnected. They do not simply vie with one another but influence each other's content and significance.

In the coastal environment, economic goals have social consequences, and historical values are affected by both social and economic interests. Biological and more generally scientific values profoundly influence ecological values. Different recreational interests may complement or clash with one another and affect the concerns of conservationists and fishermen. And all these interests are part of the domain of human activity, which is always an ethical domain. At the same time, how we pursue these varied interests has environmental and perceptual effects. Just as following these interests possesses ethical significance, their qualitative, perceptual content is central to their experience, and so aesthetic values become inseparable from these others.

As the context of human life, then, environment is always perceptual and always normative, and this is nowhere more significant than in the coastal environment. How can we best depict this fusion of factors and values, of ethical and aesthetic meanings? What can a coastal aesthetics tell us about environment and so about our place in the world?

**The fluid environment**

Aldo Leopold used the metaphor of an energy circuit to depict the interrelated components of the land: soil, water, plants, animals. The land, he writes, is ‘a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals’. This circuit is not closed but constantly dissipates energy, which it regains through natural processes in a circular pattern that is homeostatic unless disrupted by human intrusions. A circuit is a rich image for environment, as it has no boundaries but is a continuous channel of energy. It also suggests an avenue in which forces and pressures are constantly at work, quickly diffusing and affecting every component of the circuit.

These are significant features because they reflect the continuities and interdependence of
all the factors in environment. Yet the metaphor has certain limitations. The literal meaning of a circuit is a circular line that encloses an area. A linear image captures the circularity of the process well but it does not embody its contextuality and inclusiveness. A different metaphor would serve us better, one that points up the force, pressure, interdependence, and continuity that are central to environment, both understood ecologically and experienced aesthetically. That metaphor is provided by water. Perhaps the original insight of the earliest known philosopher can serve us yet again.

The coastal environment exemplifies the pervasiveness of water and its metaphorical significance. The continuity of water on the earth's surface reflects the continuity of a fluid, and in this trait it embodies the continuities among the various factors that make up an environment. As one of its principal constituent factors, water also serves as a metonym for the coastal environment, a part that effectively represents the entire environment. For the coast is a fluid environment, mobile and flowing, and the fluid connectedness of water stands as a metaphor for the continuity of factors, including normative ones, in both the structure and the experience of environment.

Not only is the coastal environment fluid and continuous. Because its constant changes are so visible, the coast also reflects the ephemerality of every environment which, though not always apparent, is nonetheless a distinctive feature. Because it is difficult to separate ourselves from the coast in order to consider it objectively from a distance, the coastal environment encourages perceptual immersion. This, too, is a trait of all environments, and the coastal environment exhibits it with unusual vividness.

Thus every environment we inhabit is continuous, fluid, and ephemeral, and we are immersed in its flow. By returning perceptually to our origins in the sea, then, we can better understand who we are and where we are.
NOTES

1 This chapter is revised from a lecture given at the Third Annual Summer School in Applied Aesthetics on ‘The Coastal Environment’, sponsored by the International Institute of Applied Aesthetics and held in Newport, RI on 3-8 August 1997. It has not previously been published.


4 Taylor, Ch. 1

5 These meanings were proposed by other participants in the ‘Coastal Environment’ summer school: Emily Brady (edge), Yuriko Saito (boundary), Barbara Sandrisser (shore), and David Cain (between, closure and opening).

6 Edward Bullough, ‘“Psychical Distance” as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle’, *British Journal of Psychology*, V (1913). This essay has often been reprinted.


8 A circuit may also signify the space enclosed within such a circular line. But here the metaphor breaks down, for a space does not possess the flow of energy so suggestive in the earlier meaning nor does it capture the continuity and interrelatedness that are central to an ecosystem. It also connotes being sequential and unidirectional, whereas environmental factors act reciprocally.
Chapter VI

THE WORLD FROM THE WATER

Introduction

We come to know an environment by engaging the landscape. We do this by experiencing its processes, learning about its historical meanings and its geographical characteristics, and appreciating its values. These values emerge when we focus our attention primarily in the present tense of perceptual experience, on the experience of our senses: seeing, hearing, touching; feeling the wind on our faces, the ground beneath our feet and the sound, look, and touch of water as we move in the nature we meet and the nature we have made. Such perceptual experiences of environment as these, by that fact, possess value including, in a primordial sense, aesthetic value.

The experience of aesthetic value is part of every kind of environment, even though this value may not always be dominant and may not always be positive. Experiencing environments aesthetically is, in fact, an embodied argument for the importance of environmental values. Furthermore, an aesthetic encounter is a way to approach environmental education by helping to cultivate feelings of care and responsibility for the earth. Each environment provides an opportunity for a distinctive aesthetic experience. Water environments have a distinctive character of their own, and this chapter continues the study begun in the previous chapter.

An environmental context in which water is the central component has a powerful sensory impact. Because it engages us perceptually on a basic level, it is profoundly aesthetic and at the same time it also determines our very orientation in the world. We considered in the last chapter how the perspective from the water changes our perception of the coast. Taking our position from the water instead of the land alters our orientation and transforms our very sense of environment. This chapter carries the transformative perspective of the water forward by considering water as a full and inclusive environment in its own right and explores its aesthetic
implications.

Experiencing the world from the water provides an unusual perspective and one that varies with the particular kind of water environment we participate in. For a water setting can influence how we understand ourselves and our place in the world. We experience the water in many different ways. In a country like Finland and states in the United States such as Minnesota and Maine where the water is never far away, its presence becomes part of our experience of landscape. We regard a water environment most often from a safe distance, as when viewing a lake from a nearby hill or building or standing on the shore. Sometimes we meet the water from the deck of a ship. Our association grows more intimate the closer we come to its surface, such as by sailing a boat or paddling a kayak. Perhaps the most intimate encounter of all is in swimming.

Let me begin by describing several different experiences on the water. The first recounts a canoe trip I took some years ago down the Genesee River, a river in central New York State in the United States. Mark Twain's account of piloting a steamboat on the Mississippi River in the nineteenth century offers another way of looking at a water environment. A still different kind of orientation comes in knowing the land from the sea that is suggested by Buckminster Fuller's nautical geography. Swimming is the last in this sequence of water environments, and it offers a still different kind of experience. After considering these environmental experiences, I shall offer some general observations about the world that we come to know from the water. Finally, I want to consider what this aqueous perspective can contribute to environmental education.

A canoe trip down the Genesee River

When I went with a friend by canoe down the Genesee River one spring, our purpose was not free-spirited adventure. It was rather to experience a region from the river that so decisively formed its landscape. The Genesee begins in the Allegheny Mountains of northern Pennsylvania and winds its way northward, impeded by dams, coursing over falls, rushing through gorges, and
slowing and widening until, after a journey of some 145 miles across the full breadth of New York State, it reaches Lake Ontario, one of the Great Lakes that span the northeastern and north central border of the United States with Canada. There it joins a slower and greater flow eastward, emptying into the great St. Lawrence River, until its waters eventually merge with the Atlantic. During the course of its travels, the Genesee passes through varied terrain, from the hills of the southern tier of New York State, through the gorge and over three great falls at Letchworth State Park, across the undulating farmland of Livingston County until, within the urban reaches of Rochester, it passes over the Niagara Escarpment in three more striking waterfalls and, broadening, flows its final few miles to the lake.

The experience of paddling a canoe for three and a half days down the last sixty miles of its length provided unusual insights into that landscape. Because the river flows for nearly all that distance between high, steep, and wooded banks, its low-lying surface made the surrounding countryside almost entirely invisible. We were, in effect, in a riverine forest, with a surprisingly rich variety and quantity of wildlife, even though the larger landscape is mainly agricultural, becoming urban only at its northern extremity. Yet all along the river, even when bordered by fast, noisy highways as we entered the city, the wildlife inhabiting its banks was an intimate and absorbing attraction. Moreover, following the tortuous course of the Genesee provided a curious experience of directionality. Its meanders are so numerous and sharp that the easy curves of the river's forward movement brought us into every relation with the sun, which was now on our backs but soon after in our eyes. As time changes when one is on the water, so does space, for distance on the river has no relation to distance on land.

But what struck us most was how few signs there were of any significant human activity. We found an abandoned recreational vehicle mired in the mud flats below the Mt. Morris dam where we began and later, on two occasions, the carcass of a car half absorbed by the steep bank. In only a few places had trash been dumped over the high bank and, in Rochester itself, the river was remarkably clean.

We were in what is known as a gallery forest, a linear environment of parallel tree and
shrub growth separated by the open space of the river. This largely untouched forest had been shaped by the erosive action of the river and it follows along the river’s high, eroded banks and sharp bends. While some large old trees raised their limbs high above the banks, most of the tree growth was more moderate in size, limited perhaps by the river's incessant process of reshaping its course and thus the landscape. This, in fact, was one of the most striking features of the scene, the continuation on a more gentle scale of the same process that had formed the entire valley thousands of years earlier. All about us were signs that this benign river could become a fierce torrent, gouging out thirty-foot banks, toppling giant old trees, washing away acres of soil to deposit them on the inside shore of its many bends and build up new fields, only to cut through them, too, years later. The banks of the river were littered with the whitened corpses of great trees, many of them hidden beneath the surface of the water, waiting to snag an unwary boater. All we saw of their presence was an occasional branch and sometimes a mere stick poking above the surface. Other trees leaned precariously over roots that were mostly exposed, ready to topple in a strong wind or from a corrosive current. We saw strange evidence of the river’s maraudings in the bizarre sight of a large trunk buried prostrate ten or twenty feet below the top of an eroded bank and protruding toward the river, threatening our passing craft like the cannon of some great warship. A different, more delicate sign of the river's more recent action appeared in the tiny, narrow terraces cut in the mud along the steep banks, following every bulge, curve, and angle as carved by the moving edge of the water.

While the visual setting betrayed few indications of a changing human presence, our other senses were more revealing. The dominant sounds were the quiet splash of our paddles and the calls of birds in the trees high above, the delightful accompaniment of woodland canoeing. At times we could hear the water ahead flowing over a rocky obstruction. The noise of the internal combustion engine has come to signal and surround human activity, and while we had the good fortune to escape its drone for most of the trip, such sounds of human activity were not entirely absent. We could hear an occasional small airplane and even passed through the ambient sounds of a small airport. The roar of a tractor filled the space briefly on a couple of occasions.
On one of them the farmer was plowing so close to the bank that we actually exchanged waves with him.

But traffic noise is the most salient mark of human activity, and this would warn us of an approaching bridge. As we neared Rochester, this noise became increasingly insistent, yet, oddly enough, it actually diminished as the river moved into the city. Paddling past the mouth of Black Creek and toward Genessee Valley Park, the quiet and the forest returned.

Smells were unavoidable. We noted a number of pipes and conduits, large and small, draining into the river. From some there emanated the froth and smell of soap. Still less pleasant was the effluent from sewage treatment plants and the chemical smell from industrial activity. None of these, fortunately, was frequent. On a few occasions we found fishermen along the banks, hopefully more knowledgeable than we about the quality of the water.

As one glides along a secluded river, large things become monumental and even small ones are notable. We were startled by the great bulk of a power catamaran stranded on a bar, blocking all but a narrow passage to its left. Later, on the last leg of our journey, the enormous concrete arch of Memorial Bridge served as a magnificent gateway to the lake. Among the more modest sights were hornets' nests hung like Japanese lanterns from trees at intervals along the river, clearly visible among branches that had not yet leafed out. But one of our greatest delights lay in the wildlife we observed: jumping fish, one of them a foot long, deer, many muskrats in and out of the water, possibly an otter, and signs of beaver even on the river bank in Rochester. We were not expert birders nor could we remain as patient and motionless as one needs to, but the long list of unmistakable sightings that we gathered surprised us.

As the Genessee approaches Lake Ontario, the gorge declines into hills and then flattens out, the river widens, and some marshy areas appeared, covered with the stalks of the previous year's reeds, adding variety to the scene. Near the lake, marinas take over, and we ended at Ontario Beach amid the swells coming in from the lake and the activity of other boaters. The scene was in striking contrast to our previous three days, for only on the last did we encounter a single other boater on the river.
What is most striking in this descriptive account of the water world of a small river is how predominantly sensory a domain it was. All the senses joined in an acute awareness of the perceptual qualities of that environment: sight, smell, hearing, tactility, kinesthesia, all inseparable in our sensory immersion in the riverine setting. This trip combined several interests – research, the practical demands of guiding the canoe and finding a suitable place to pull out each night, and recognizing animals, birds, and the other things we encountered. But most pervasive and powerful was the aesthetic character of the experience, a character that was always present and dominated all other interests.

Mark Twain on the Mississippi River

Mark Twain, who spent years piloting a steamboat on the Mississippi River, was struck by the contrast between the aesthetic delights of the river and the practical demands of navigating it. In *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain likened the surface of the water to a book, unreadable to the passenger who could not decipher its script, but revealing its secrets with complete lucidity to the attentive eyes of the river pilot. Because the river was constantly changing, he found it a book that always needed to be re-read, with ‘a new story to tell every day’. The untutored passenger might notice a faint dimple on the surface of the water, but the pilot would read it in italics, in capital letters and with exclamation points, for it told him that beneath the surface a rock or a wreck lurked that could tear a gash in any vessel. ‘The passenger who could not read this book saw nothing but all manner of pretty pictures in it, painted by the sun and shaded by the clouds, whereas to the trained eye these were not pictures at all, but the grimmest and most dead-earnest of reading matter’.

Once Twain had mastered the language of the Mississippi, all its beauty vanished for him. He wrote poetically of the qualities he had once enjoyed; of a certain sunset when
‘a broad expanse of the river was turned to blood; in the middle distance the red hue brightened into gold, through which a solitary log came floating, black and conspicuous; in one place a long, slanting mark lay sparkling upon the water; in another the surface was broken by boiling, tumbling rings, that were as many-tinted as an opal; where the ruddy flush was faintest, was a smooth spot that was covered with graceful circles and radiating lines, ever so delicately traced; the shore on our left was densely wooded, and the somber shadow that fell from this forest was broken in one place by a long, ruffled train that shone like sliver; and high above the forest wall a clean-stemmed dead tree waved a single leafy bough that glowed like a flame in the unobstructed splendor that was flowing from the sun. There were graceful curves, reflected images, woody heights, soft distances; and over the whole scene, far and near, the dissolving lights drifted steadily, enriching it every passing moment with new marvels of coloring’.

Unfortunately, this did not last, for when Twain became a seasoned river pilot he no longer enjoyed the loveliness of these features but saw each of them as a sign of changing weather or a dreadful hazard. ‘Now when I had mastered the language of this water, and had come to know every trifling feature that bordered the great river as familiarly as I knew the letters of the alphabet, I had made a valuable acquisition. But I had lost something, too. I had lost something which could never be restored to me which I loved. All the grace, the beauty, the poetry, had gone out of the majestic river!’

**Buckminster Fuller's recasting of geography**

The sea imposes a very different outlook on environment. There is a natural reciprocity between the water and the land, although its character varies with the configuration of the shoreline. The terrain always begins at water level and rises, sometimes beyond the low, flat sweep of a marsh,
sometimes abruptly with the steepness of a rocky outcropping, a hill, or a high cliff. The natural shoreline itself is never straight. Its curves, coves, bays, and harbors all call out in different ways, inviting one in for shelter from the wind and protection from waves, bringing us ashore, warning us to keep a safe distance, or merely offering a more intimate sense of the details and textures of the edge — its plants, flowers, creatures, material. In every case, however, the shore faces the water, whose magnetic influence profoundly affects the structures people build there. These often possess a welcoming quality, whether they are homes and villages, piers or docks, for they tend to lead the eye and perhaps the foot inward and upward.

But a different perspective of the shore is possible. The visionary designer Buckminster Fuller was a life-long sailor, and that experience supplied his creative imagination with a unique environmental perspective. As we noted in Chapter 5, Fuller regarded of the shore as the edge of the water instead of thinking of the shore as the edge of the land. Knowing the land from the vantage point of the sea gives us a remarkably different sense of the nature of our world. For the sailor, motion is unceasing and universal. ‘He sees everything in motion, from the slopping of the coffee in the pot to the peregrinations of the major magnitude stars’. Only the pole star ‘seems to float motionless as the world’s mooring buoy in the sky’. The orbiting of the moon and the sun, the rise and fall of the tide, the imperious claim of physical laws that cannot be ignored or overlooked: the direct presence of all these marks the difference in the nautical environment. It led Fuller to transform the geography of the planet into different ways of reconfiguring its land and water surfaces, a reconfiguration that resulted in alternative maps of the world. He then proceeded to re-write the history of the spread of civilization on the basis of an evolving sailing technology whose adaptive boat designs reflected the prevailing wind currents.

Whatever we may think of Fuller’s speculations on geography and the history of civilization, what is important here is how our experience is transfigured when we consider the land from the standpoint of the water. We realize not only that we are continually part of a constellation of motions but that, because of our ever-changing position, we must constantly
reconsider how we stand in relation to everything else. Basic experiences are transformed. We become intensely aware of the process of entering and leaving, whether a dock or a harbor. Our eyes continually search the horizon and the sky for signs of changing weather. We find ourselves constantly reassessing our direction and distance in the light of changes in our position and the conditions of sky, wind, and water. Even moments of rest are only temporary, for we can quickly haul anchor and sail on, and our neighbors and surroundings are themselves constantly in flux. The sailor is caught up in a world both dynamic and unstable.

**Swimming**

Last and most briefly, I want to mention the water world of the swimmer. Swimming is the most intimate of water experiences, and since we all emerge at birth from the amniotic fluid, we may even say that we enter the world by swimming. No environmental experience involves a more direct physical encounter. The eye is of minor importance for once, as the physical urgencies of ‘being in the world’ usurp the relative safety of visual distance. What is perceptually distinctive about swimming is that it is almost entirely tactual. We live in the water as active bodies, feeling its weight, its force, its density, its temperature tactually and kinesthetically. The basic processes of living in the world are here physically present and peremptory.

The water environment of the swimmer is unlike any other. While our buoyancy varies with the degree of salinity, water, being denser than air, always supports us, so that the pull of gravity is lessened and may even seem to disappear. This can affect our sense of direction. Without the advantage of the airplane pilot’s navigational instruments, divers have been known to lose their sense of where the surface is and drown by swimming downward in a futile attempt to reach it. The feeling of being suspended in a liquid medium is perhaps the fullest experience of physical equilibrium we can attain without venturing into outer space. It provides direct experience of our immersion in environment, which is a fact of every environment, even though this is less apparent when the principal medium is air rather than water.
**Knowing the world from the water**

What do water environments tell us about our world? Are they so different in degree from land environments that they become different in kind, so that the two have little in common? Consider how the features that order the world change when one comes to know it from the water.

As we saw in the last chapter, motion is constant and our position always changing. For one thing, the force of gravity relinquishes its hard and rapid downward thrust. In place of the rigid, unyielding surfaces of the land, the water is soft, more like a coiled spring than a hard floor. And its pull is not only downward but sideways, undulating and rolling with the ever-changing contour and press of the waves, swells, and currents. Movement takes on a different character. The sharp and regular geometry of the land gives way to an irregular shoreline of coves and points of land, and the course we follow is often made uneven from the action of wind and current. The smaller the boat and the closer we are to the surface of the water, the more pronounced these irregularities become. Movement is slower than on land, too, and often we cannot head straight to our destination but must move obliquely, tacking a sailboat into the wind or a canoe into the waves, or avoiding a strong wind directly from behind by tacking downwind and, even in the case of a large vessel, altering course to follow a channel or avoid a storm. On a river, of course, one is also bound to follow its unique curvilinear shape. Movement, moreover, does not reflect the abruptness of the land-locked traveler’s actions. There are no sudden starts or stops; everything happens with a kind of elasticized slow motion, almost dance-like in its graceful transitions. Sound, too, is different on the water. Its usual reliability in helping us determine distance and location can no longer be trusted. Sound travels more clearly and farther over water, but the influence of humidity, wind, and fog make it hard to estimate its distance and direction. In fog, for example, the ringing of a bell buoy may be distorted, so that at times one cannot tell whether it is coming from in front or behind.

Such divergences from our usual experience produce a different kind of world, a world in which we must live in a different way. Because of constant changes and irregularities in wind
and water, it is difficult to predict what will happen next and this demands constant observation and careful attention. Space is profoundly altered, losing much of its regularity and its abstract independence of conditions. So, too, does time change, for it is deeply affected by weather conditions, speed, and movement. Furthermore, both space and time tend to be elongated. All this unevenness leads to dissimilar experiences of distance, depending on the particular water environment and our mode of moving in it.

But despite the striking contrast with the land environment, the basic features of our water world may not be so very different from how they seem on land. They emerge instead more insistently and dramatically on the water. The world from the water is a world of constant motion and change, features that are less apparent on land, where the built environment gives us a deceptive sense of stability and control. Yet motion and change are as incessant and inevitable on land as on water. And with the movement of change comes an elasticity of time and space, all three inseparable from one another. For time is influenced by how we are moving in space, and our sense of space tends to be shaped by the time it takes to traverse it. We are also more likely to be liberated from the tyranny of the clock when we are on the water, for here we are freer to bend our sense of space and time to the conditions in which we must function. This is true on land, as well, for when people have the opportunity for greater freedom and flexibility, they do not hesitate to seize it. And on both land and water, we inhabit a world of natural forces, a world that is vulnerable to their vagaries.

Our awareness of these conditions of experience depends on the care and acuteness with which we notice the perceptual qualities of our environment. Both worlds of water and land are worlds of perceptual experience, of sensings on which we reflect and out of which we build the different ways we have of understanding the human world. From such experiences come those bodies of knowledge that give shape and order to the world we inhabit: history, the different sciences, and the various arts. But the water environment, by the prominence it gives perceptual experience, grants the aesthetic dimension a central place. What can the special demands of functioning in a water environment contribute to our understanding of the aesthetic?
Convention has it that aesthetic satisfaction is incompatible with the practical interest we take in things, and Mark Twain carried this over to his experience as a river pilot. But is a sharp opposition between the practical and the aesthetic inevitable? Perhaps it may result more from a culture that opposes the beautiful to the useful than from the necessary exclusion of one from the other because they are conceptually contradictory or experientially impossible. In fact, one of the striking features of this changed world of the water is the way in which the aesthetic serves a practical function at the same time as it provides sensory interest and delight. The splash of the paddle, the ripple of water against the hull, the wind pressing the sails and whistling through the rigging, the feel of the water against the swimmer’s skin as hands and arms force the body through its fluid medium – all these are equally sensings and signs, perceptual pleasures and indicators of how to proceed. They tell us about the influence of current and leeward drift; they say something about how and in what direction our boat or our body is moving and how these forces are affecting our course. This is a world rich with sense and meaning, both of them inseparable in situation and experience.

Of course, the balance of the practical and aesthetic aspects varies with the specific occasion. Sometimes the distinctive beauty of the water spreads over the whole scene. We experience this when sailing on a broad reach in a fair breeze, with wind, hull, sails, and helmsman in perfect accord, full of delight in the exhilaration of the moment. Water’s beauty also emerges when paddling or rowing a small craft in a breathless calm across the mirror surface of the water during morning or evening twilight. At other times the demands of controlling one’s vessel and surviving the powerful forces of wind and waves predominate, as when clawing off a leeward shore, sailing on a hard slog to windward, or running rapids in a canoe. Much of our experience on water, as on land, displays a more even balance of beauty and practicality, and one of the many virtues of a water environment is the insistent presence of the aesthetic under all conditions.

The four water environments I have described offer valuable insights for enlarging our understanding of environment. Paddling down the Genesee or any river shows us the force that
water has in creating its own place by influencing, even determining, the shape of the land. Piloting a steamboat down the Mississippi actually exhibits the relevance of aesthetic perception in presenting practical signs for achieving a safe passage. Knowing the land from the standpoint of the sea suggests that the fundamental characteristics of the water environment may provide a truer understanding of the human world. And, finally, the environmental immersion in swimming gives us a direct experience of the fusion of our bodies with the perceptual world.

**Environmental education and the water environment**

Let me turn, last of all, to the special contributions this engagement in the water environment can make to environmental education. For this is education not only about environment but also about how we might live harmoniously in the world. First and most directly, the water environment encourages attentiveness to details and signs in nature: It teaches perceptual acuteness. Part of the special pleasure we find in the water is that every change of wind, light, water surface, and motion is experienced immediately. But at the same time these changes tell us much about the particular environment we are part of and how its shifting appearance both reflects what may be hidden and anticipates what may happen.

This leads us to realize that things are not always what they appear to be. Experiencing water environments teaches us to place in question the meaning of the obvious, especially the regularity and predictability of the land. Appearances may be deceptive and very different meanings may lie beneath the surface. This is a valuable lesson not only for knowing nature but for politics and social life, as well.

This larger and deeper understanding can encourage adaptability to constantly changing conditions. Guiding ourselves on the water, whether as swimmers, paddlers, or sailors, is never a sleepy or haphazard matter. One is always thinking ahead, considering possible developments and planning for various contingencies. Living in a water world provides an invaluable lesson in forethought and resourcefulness.
This constant activity of perceiving, understanding, and responding to the situation gives us a rich and valuable lesson in living within the processes of the natural world. In particular, it exemplifies the reciprocity of natural forces and conditions, how these are not discrete objects and events but are interrelated and continuous. Most of all, the water environment forces us to see ourselves as an inseparable part of those processes. We are immersed in the world, which is at the same time a world transmuted by human agency. And, like Spinoza, we come to discover the ultimate unity of nature and to recognize as the human place is a part of the natural world. This is all too easy to overlook in the urbanized culture of the developed world, with its intangible and abstract computer model of knowledge, inquiry, and thought.

Finally, water environments lead us to respect natural processes. They give us a sober sense of human proportions and limitations. Because water environments are largely not human-made and so are not in the image of human culture, we are forced to recognize the limits of our power. Recognizing this with our bodies as well as with our understanding is a profound environmental lesson. To live, then, as a harmonious part of the natural process is to be most truly human. Perhaps the world from the water can best help us grasp this most important lesson of all.
NOTES

1 This chapter originally appeared in a Finnish translation by Tommi Nuopponen entitled ‘Maailma vedestä käsin’, in Vesi vetää puoleensa [Water Allures], edited by Yrjö Sepänmaa and Liisa Heikkilä Palo (Helsinki: Maahenki Oy, 2002), pp. 228-237. It has been revised and is reprinted by permission of Maahenki Oy.

2 This was a trip the author made in May 1994 with Richard Gilman.

3 The list includes cliff swallows nesting in the eroded banks, numerous red-tailed hawks and turkey vultures soaring overhead, and many great blue herons and kingfishers, along with the cedar waxwing, plover, short-billed dowitcher, Baltimore oriole, phoebe, yellow warbler and other unidentified warblers. Common birds included the redwing blackbird, cardinal, robin, blue jay, mallard, mourning dove, and goldfinch. We sighted an owl which we could not further identify, as well as many sandpipers. On two occasions pairs of Canada geese with goslings, far from their bolder city relatives, put on a dramatic display of defensive and protective behavior. The exhibition of bird life continued into Rochester, where we saw the yellow warbler, common yellowthroat, black-and-white warbler, common grackle, herring gull, mallard, great blue heron, redwing blackbird, kingfisher, and barn swallow.

4 ‘This sun means that we are going to have wind tomorrow; that floating log means that the river is rising, small thanks to it; that slanting mark on the water refers to a bluff reef which is going to kill somebody's steamboat one of these nights, if it keeps on stretching out like that; those tumbling “boils” show a dissolving bar and a changing/channel there; the lines and circles in the slick water over yonder are a warning that that troublesome place is shoaling up dangerously; that silver streak in the shadow of the forest is the “break” from a new snag, and he has located himself in the very best place he could have found to fish for steamboats; that tall dead tree, with a single living branch, is not going to last long, and then how is a body ever going to get through this blind place at night without the friendly old landmark?’ Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi (1874 and 1875). (New York: Harper, n.d.), pp. 77-80, 258-259.

5 R. Buckminster Fuller, ‘Fluid Geography’, in Ideas and Integrities (New York: Collier, 1969), p. 120.

6 In long distance swimming, this changes, for the sound of one’s breathing overpowers all the other senses.

7 For an account of an extended experience of swimming, see Roger Deakin, Waterlog: A
IS THERE LIFE IN VIRTUAL SPACE? ¹

Let me begin with a passage from one of the best-known and most unusual poems in English literature, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's ‘Kubla Khan’(1798):

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
    Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery. ²

One no longer has to be an oriental potentate to decree a ‘pleasure dome’. Today we can create our own personal pleasure dome on the computer screen instead of in an opium reverie and more easily (although the addiction has not disappeared). And instead of Coleridge’s romantic dream landscape, we have a different region, as ephemeral and fantastic as his, perhaps even more so. What is this environment, often called ‘virtual’? How can we understand the order that this so-called ‘virtual’ world takes and within which it works? And how does this world relate to that other world, or should I say, more properly, other worlds, within which we
ordinarily live or used to live?

**Life in outer space**

Let me begin with an apparently simpler case, simpler because it deals with a more concrete subject: the question of whether there is life in outer space. I shall not presume to answer that question here or even to deal with it as thoroughly as it requires. However, some parallels hold between this domain and that of the virtual world, and becoming little clearer about issues in the one will help us in better understanding the conditions of the other, the virtual environment.

What is meant by life in outer space? Life here suggests an organic presence, at the very least, life on the simplest level — bacteria or other unicellular organisms. But this is only mildly satisfying, for its attraction is largely that it renders possible more complex living forms, for what we seem to be most interested in is not simply life but something approaching human life. By this I think we mean a human-like intelligence and a human sensibility even more than a human form, for we are able to countenance here even the little green men of the science fiction comic strips. They qualify as our kind of life because they possess an intelligence and a sensibility that is comparable to our own. If I read this science fiction fantasy accurately, then, it embodies our quest for an anthropomorphic universe, a universe that we can understand because it is constructed more or less in our own image. This begins to lead us to the virtual world, a world we have constructed ourselves.

There is another interesting observation to be made that is perhaps more significant yet. This is the interrelation in our fantasy of sensibility and intelligence. We would not be content, I think, with little green men who think as we do but who do not have similar perceptions. They would be more like robots than humans and we would not respect them, inasmuch as their intelligence would have little that is imaginative or creative but would consist in merely processing in a mechanical fashion the patterns of behavior and response that are programmed into them. Some little green men may be drawn like that, and then they become our enemies —
alien creatures without feeling whose aim is to dominate or destroy human civilization, like the diabolical scientist we often encounter in science fiction. A more benign picture, however, projects these little green men more kindly. They may be different from us in appearance but enough like us not to be threatening but to be tolerated and, even though we may regard them as inferior, to become companions, like Robinson Crusoe's man Friday or The Lone Ranger's Tonto of an earlier day.

The fiction of a universe populated by creatures whose intelligence is joined to a human sensibility suggests a most interesting question, a Kantian sort of question: What is required for a human-like sensibility conjoined with intelligence to be possible? Allow me to continue this fantastic exploration of outer space a little further.

The preconditions of sensibility

'Sensibility' is defined by the *OED* as the ‘power or faculty of feeling, capacity of sensation and emotion as distinguished from cognition and will’ and as ‘quickness and acuteness of apprehension or feeling; the quality of being easily and strongly affected by emotional influences; sensitiveness’. Sensibility thus presupposes the capacity for perceptual experience and for ready and acute responses. For this capacity to be exercised, certain conditions are necessary. Kant's transcendental aesthetic is a valuable guide, for perception always and necessarily occurs within a temporal and spatial matrix. His depiction of the conditions of experience, however, was drawn on the eighteenth-century canvas of the Newtonian universe. This is a static universe, as we know, in which time and space are fixed and absolute, and the picture it provides is stable, objective, and unchanging.

It has been difficult for our present century to relinquish its hold on that world, for it offers the stability and security of an elusive Archimedean fixed point. Philosophers have been struggling for nearly two centuries to develop an alternative world view, one based on change and process, and this has received powerful and continually increasing support from evolutionary
biology, relativity physics, and quantum mechanics. Accepting an understanding of the universe as dynamic, relative, and evolving carries not just an intellectual challenge but a moral one. And it requires a change in sensibility that aesthetics can help us understand and achieve. For sensibility requires not only time and space but *movement*, as well, and it is by including movement among the conditions of experience that we can accommodate a metaphysics of change.

The conditions of perception have not only expanded to include movement, but movement and the change that it allows have altered time and space, too. We have left far behind the Newtonian sense of time as unidirectional, regular, and objective. Chronological time has a place in our world, but it is a limited place and one that always brings our *perception* of time up short. That is because lived time has very different characteristics, and it is in the arts that these traits have been developed and extended. First in the novel, then in film, and now in interactive, hypertext fiction, the temporal order has returned to the order of memory and imagination. Through pacing that is slowed down or speeded up, with flashbacks, stills, repetition, and the reader-determined order of lexias, time is elasticized, rearranged, shaped in the endless variety of forms that such fluid media as these allow. Electronic time works in similar ways. The telephone collapses time zones and the video and film documentary make the past present, remake events, and eternalize the past, which then never changes. All these modes of temporal experience are entirely bound up with space and movement, as we shall see.

What, then, of computer time? Like the other modes of temporal experience, this has its own characteristics. Computer time takes place on the realm of the screen and is partly dependent on the speed and style of the operator. It is stationary in the segmented ‘spaces’ of parallel programs and subsumptive directories waiting to be activated, and it is discontinuous and fragmentary there. While more may be said here, let us consider space.

Our conception of space has shifted from the terrestrial space of Euclidean geometry, through the absolute space of Newtonian physics, to the interstellar relative space of Einsteinian theory. Like time, space has become malleable and its modalities have changed and enlarged in
similar ways. Fiction has long freely reordered space, and film and video have fragmented it into
stills and shots that can be manipulated and rearranged as a space collage. In different ways the
telephone and fax machine have swallowed space and reduced it to intimacy.

To the space of fiction, film, and the telephone we now must add the electronic space of
the computer. As with time, computer space is discontinuous. It becomes the space of software
programs, each program defining its own spatial characteristics. And within each program there
are subspaces that can be manipulated by moving, rearranging, and copying. With divine-like
power, space can be created (new files and folders) and destroyed (by deleting). There is even a
limbo in the computer, a space where information is stored in a buffer or a server, suspended
until it is called up. Time and space may become continuous, as when sending an e-mail message
space turns into time and, in receiving it, time achieves a spatial form.

Still further, the fluid universe of modern physics is far different from the static world of
classical physics. A contemporary transcendental aesthetic is therefore incomplete without
adding motion to space and time. A phenomenology of motion must, however, go well beyond
the simple physical occurrence of actual movement, which consists in a change of location or
position anywhere in space-time. Like time and space, motion also assumes many different
modalities. To movement in the world of fiction, in which characters, scene, and action may
move, each in its own way, and in the world of film, which adds to these the movement of the
camera and the lens, there are the curious ways in which electronic motion occurs. The actual
movement of the eyes and the hands guides the movement of the cursor. Then there is the broad
range of operations we perform with files and folders by scrolling, finding, cutting and pasting,
opening and closing, shifting among various operations, lexias, and files, all of which occur in
nearly instantaneous chronological time.

'Virtual' environments

Are computer and other electronic environments virtual? Can we consider computer time, space,
and motion to be actual or virtual? I hesitate to adopt this distinction, however, even though it is
commonly assumed. For virtual is contrasted unfavorably with actual or real, and so to call electronic environments virtual is to prejudge their reality and consequently their significance. Is this tenable?

Every environment, virtual or otherwise, has its own characteristic aesthetic. Take time, for one case. Different virtual environments produce distinctive uses and patterns of time, varying it in speed, direction, order, continuity, thickness, layers, singularity and multiplicity, and other such traits. Time, moreover, is inseparable from space and motion, for it is always experienced in a particular environment and at a certain rate of movement. We may say, then, that time is environment-dependent and never isolated, separate, or self-contained.

Quite the same thing can be said of space and motion in the electronic world as in the ordinary one. Like time, space is in the hands of the perceiver and, similarly, the degree, direction, and speed of movement are under the perceiver's control, to the extent that one has a hand (literally) in directing them. Furthermore, space cannot be thought of apart from time and motion. And motion is inseparable from time and space. All three are, in fact, interrelated: Motion requires time and occurs across space, time is known only through movement in space, and space is perceived through motion in time. All three preconditions of sensibility are thus interdependent. This, indeed, is as true of the actual aesthetic as it is of the cyberspace. Indeed, I want to suggest that on perceptual grounds no such distinction can reasonably be drawn, that there is actually no virtuality at all, and that what we have are actually different modes of reality. 4

This computer-generated 'virtual' world is not entirely new, for we also encounter so-called virtuality outside the computer. Consider the distinctive spatio-temporal-dynamic environments of memory, of history, of imagination, of letter-writing, of the telephone, and of each of the different arts, especially fiction and film. Each of these perceptual environments constructs its own mode of actuality or reality, and the electronic environment of cyberspace is different only in kind and not ontologically. The principle of ontological parity, developed by the American metaphysician Justus Buchler, offers the most useful and effective concept for dealing
with the equal ontological status of different orders of things. For Buchler, ‘whatever is
discriminated in any way ... is a natural complex, and no complex is more “real”, more “natural”,
more “genuine”, or more “ultimate” than any other. There is no ground, except perhaps a
short-range rhetorical one, for a distinction between the real and the “really real”, between being
and “true being”’.\(^5\)1966), p. 31. And, we might add here, between actual and virtual. To
paraphrase Hegel, the real is the virtual and the virtual is the real.

All those forms of ontological priority that infest the realm of art as well as the realm of
ordinary life, all those discriminations that devalue great regions of experience by dismissing
them as dream, illusion, imagination, wish, fiction, or make-believe — all are as misguided and
damaging ontologically as discriminations based on gender, race, or ethnicity are socially. The
former are as false to our experience as the latter are to our common humanity. For as we live in
the world of illusion, or fiction, or memory, or imagination, we live as truly as we do in the
world of supermarkets and expressways or in the world of economics. Perhaps more truly
because more passionately.

'Reality', then, is multiple — 'realities'. Following Spinoza, we can affirm that there is
one world but that it can assume many different modes. The electronic world is neither more real
nor less real than the world of dreams or the world of daily activities. In fact, we might regard
the realm of cyberspace, cybertime, and cybermotion as the dream world of the inhabitants of the
high tech computer world. We can learn here from the African Bushmen, who think of creation
as a dream dreaming us.\(^6\) Perhaps, in fact, the Internet is our creation dream, as Xanadu was
Kubla Khan's. These cases are different from the Bushmen's, however, since we are both the
creator and the created. In a profound sense, the worlds we inhabit are as dependent on us as
Einsteinian space is on the observer. The human presence, then, is as integral to a cyberaesthetic
as it is to the aesthetic of every other environment. Nor can we ever stand entirely outside it.
Moreover, the cyberenvironment offers resistance to our desires and imposes its demands on us,
just as other environments do.

Let me end by recalling Coleridge. Writing down his vividly remembered poetic dream
upon awakening, Coleridge was called from his room by a person who came from Porlock on business. When more than an hour later he returned to his composition, he discovered that all that was left was a vague and general recollection and a few scattered lines of the poem, of which he had composed two to three hundred lines while dreaming. All that remains are the fifty-four that he had copied out earlier.

Where, in our creation dream, is the ‘man from Porlock’, the person who stands firmly in the so-called ‘real’ world? There is no one.
NOTES

1 This chapter is a revised version of a paper read at the State University of New York at Buffalo on 27 Jan 2000 and was previously unpublished.


4 This is consistent with Dewey’s postulate of immediate empiricism: ‘By our postulate, things are what they are experienced to be’. ‘[W]e have a contrast, not between a Reality, and various approximations to, or phenomenal representations of Reality, but between different reals of experience’. John Dewey, ‘The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism’, in The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), pp. 227-229.


Chapter VIII

IS GREASY LAKE A PLACE? ¹

The question

I begin with a quotation and then a question.

At night we went up to Greasy Lake. Through the center of town, up the strip, past the housing developments and shopping malls, street lights giving way to the thin streaming illumination of the headlights, trees crowding the asphalt in a black unbroken wall: that was the way out to Greasy Lake. The Indians had called it Wakan, a reference to the clarity of its waters. Now it was fetid and murky, the mud banks glittering with broken glass and strewn with beer cans and the charred remains of bonfires. There was a single ravaged island a hundred yards from shore, so stripped of vegetation it looked as if the air force had strafed it. We went up to the lake because everyone went there, because we wanted to snuff the rich scent of possibility on the breeze, watch a girl take off her clothes and plunge into the festering murk, drink beer, smoke pot, howl at the stars, savor the incongruous full-throated roar of rock and roll against the primeval susurrus of frogs and crickets. This was nature.²

Now my question is, Is Greasy Lake a place and, if so, what kind of place? Although we may not be able to respond readily and the question may even seem inappropriate, it cannot simply be dismissed. Perhaps by the time we come to the end of this chapter we shall be able to deal with it and even, indeed, to answer it.

‘Place’ has become an ‘in’ word. From the mass media to advertising, from the travel industry to the real estate industry, from sociology to geography, the fascination with place
testifies, I suspect, not so much to the discovery of a hidden value as to a widespread if unconscious lament over its absence. Many of us, particularly in the industrial world, inhabit anonymous environments, whose bland sterility is disguised by shiny plastic and glass surfaces. We live and work in industrialized landscapes of faceless apartment buildings and generic suburban housing developments, moving with clockwork regularity along highways that are self-propelled conveyor belts to insular factories, strip malls, and office towers. Yet we dream of some ideal place where we shall truly be at home. Besides creating an insatiable market for paradise in the form of idyllic vacations or escapes to exotic lands, the placelessness we suffer from reinforces — and perhaps epitomizes — a culture of dissatisfaction.

But what constitutes place? Many disciplines offer many answers, ranging from simply a location to the intensely present, self-transcending experience of sacred space. Our understanding and respect for the importance of place have widened and deepened from the work done over the past thirty years. But there is one dimension of place that is easily overlooked, a dimension that may be the most critical of all because it concerns the most primary sort of experience – aesthetic. Our understanding of place, multi-faceted though it be, can be enlarged still further by an increased awareness of its aesthetic dimension. To reveal this often hidden, often misunderstood dimension is what I want to undertake here. Further, I want to explore the possibility that, in grasping the aesthetic character of place, we are not merely identifying another aspect of this complex idea but rather are probing its very center. Like Plotinus’s sun, the aesthetic radiance of place illuminates its every appearance, even as its intensity decreases the farther we go from its source until place merges with the all-encompassing darkness of its negation.

Some determinants of place

In its most basic sense, place is the setting of the events of human living. It is the locus of action and intention, and present in all consciousness and perceptual experience. This human focus is
what distinguishes place from the surrounding space or from simple location.\textsuperscript{3} Humanistic geographers emphasize this anthropocentric meaning, a meaning that comes about through experience.\textsuperscript{4} Place for them is the location of experience. It is realized as a set of ‘environmental relations created in the process of human dwelling ... internally connected with time and self ....’ ‘Place thus provides an organizing principle for ... a person’s engagement or immersion in the world around’ him or her.\textsuperscript{5} This most general condition is basic to an understanding of place, but by being basic and general, it does not say enough about what is distinctive and memorable in this fundamental idea.

Some things can be said about place generally that few would contest. One of these is a special sense of identity that a location conveys. Certain qualities set it apart. It may be a physical unity conveyed through topographical features, such as being bounded by hills or surrounded by water. On the other hand, identity may be conferred by a central reference point rather than a boundary, such as a harbor or a mountain, or a monumental building, as a church, temple, or mosque. On a more modest scale, the center may be a village common or square, a great or venerable tree, a monument, or simply a great pole.

Coherence is another trait that can contribute to a sense of place. A high degree of architectural similarity or compatibility may create the sense of a distinctive place. This is especially the case when it contrasts with nearby areas, as in a historic district, the old center of a large city, or an architecturally distinguished new development. This last raises the issue of perceived value. A suburban development built to one or two conventional models has architectural coherence. But while this imparts identity to the neighborhood, it may not convey the feeling of enhanced presence that we associate with place. Coherence may also be conveyed by boundaries, as in an urban square, common, or plaza, or a bounded interior space, as the walls of a room or a house. We may realize place in a neighborhood or town that possesses a high degree of coherence relative to its scale. This may be true, as well, of an entire region, such as a mountainous area or a coastline.

Of course physical characteristics alone do not create place. Cultural geographers are
right in joining the human factor to these features. Whether this connection comes about through actions, practices, or institutions, or through the simple presence of a conscious, sensing person, it is in the interaction of human sensibility with an appropriate physical location that place acquires its distinctive meaning. One common form that this takes is when locations acquire historical or cultural associations. Sometimes these predominate in generating identity in a location not otherwise distinguished, as may occur with the site of a battlefield or a massacre, a building or location where an important document was signed, or the birthplace or home of a famous person. In such instances, place depends not so much on its physical characteristics as on the aura with which our knowledge about it invests the location. Personal memory may imbue an area with a similar distinction.

Such features, then, as physical identity and coherence, together with the consciousness of significance, can contribute to the sense of a distinctive presence that we associate with the special character of place. These are important and need to be carefully specified in each individual case. But underlying these more articulable features and giving a special quality to the sense of place is its aesthetic dimension.

Let me develop this idea in two directions. One is by suggesting a descriptive account of the aesthetic experience of place. Like any such description, aspects of it may be peculiar to the individual case and the personal experience, while others may be characteristic of a cultural sensibility. Yet hopefully some features will possess a generality that may be theoretically useful. My second line of development is to draw out implications of this description of experience for the design of place, or rather for designing the conditions in which a full experience of place can occur.

**The aesthetic in place**

We ordinarily think of the aesthetic as referring to art, to the value that distinguishes the arts from other, more ordinary objects and occasions. At times we readily ascribe this value beyond art to
nature, as when we admire a landscape or delight in the intimate wonder of a spring flower or glorious sunset. But what can this aesthetic value have to do with place?

To deal with this question we need to focus, not on the occasion or the object we call beautiful, but on the experience we have at such times and places, and on the qualities and characteristics of the situation of which that experience is a part. For what we value here lies, I think, not wholly in a work of art or a natural occurrence but in the conditions under which we encounter it and in what happens on that occasion. What, then, characterizes such an aesthetic situation?

To answer this, it is important to return to the etymological origins of the term itself. The word ‘aesthetics’ comes from the Greek *aisthēsis*, literally, perception by the senses. For Baumgarten, who in 1750 identified it as a distinct discipline, aesthetics is the science of sensory knowledge directed toward beauty, and art entails the perfection of sensory awareness. This observation is not only historically important; it sets the scene for understanding the field of aesthetics squarely on the basis of sense perception. Moreover, there can be no perception, direct or imaginative, without the body and, as it is human experience we are concerned with, the conscious, active human body. Given the development of aesthetics into complex theoretical issues in the ensuing two and a half centuries, it is important to reaffirm this sensory connection. Aesthetic perception then becomes not a purely conscious act and not a merely subjective occurrence; rather it is grounded in the human body and the existential conditions of human life. These conditions are important to specify because they bear directly on our understanding of the aesthetics of place.

People are embedded in their world, their life-world, to use an important term from phenomenology. A constant exchange takes place between organism and environment, and these are so intimately bound up with each other that our conceptual discriminations serve only heuristic purposes and often mislead us. For instance, we readily speak of an interaction of person and object or person and place, but the term ‘interaction’ presupposes an initial division which is then bridged. Yet in the most basic sense of existence, there is no separation but rather a fusion of
things usually thought of as discrete entities, such as body and consciousness, culture and organism, inner thought and an external world. Therefore we may understand the setting of human life as an integration of a person and her or his environment. These forces are not only physical objects and conditions, in the usual meaning of environment. As we have seen, they also include somatic, psychological, historical, and cultural conditions. Environment becomes the matrix of all such forces. As an integral part of an environmental field, we both shape and are formed by the multitude of forces that produce the experiential qualities of the universe we inhabit. These qualities constitute the perceptual domain in which we engage in aesthetic experience’. Ch. 10 below, pp.

As humans, then, we are inescapably embedded in a life-world that incorporates our physical bodies, our personal and communal histories, our social education and practices and, not least, our cultural ethos. Perception is integral to our experience of that world, and this means that the aesthetic is grounded in the very conditions of living. Perception, however, cannot be understood prejudicially as only or primarily visual. Particularly in environmental experience, perception is synaesthetic, since all the senses are engaged in a homogeneous fashion. The usual discrimination of the senses into distance and contact receptors not only tends to denigrate our physical experience of the world but leads to the tendency to ignore the fundamental formative importance of the senses as closely bound up with the body. Environmental experience involves the contact senses; it is ‘intimate sensing’, as one geographer puts it. These senses include the haptic sensory system, which includes not only touch but the subcutaneous perception of surface texture, contour, pressure, temperature, humidity, pain, and visceral sensation. To this we must add the kinesthetic sense, which includes muscular awareness and skeletal or joint sensation by means of which we perceive position and solidity through the degrees of resistance that surfaces have. And through the vestibular system we indirectly grasp body movement in climbing and descending, turning and twisting, moving freely or among obstructions. In such ways, environmental perception engages our full capacity for sensory perception in an interpenetration of body and context.
To know a place is to experience that environment. What, then, is it to experience place? What is distinctive about the aesthetic experience of place?

One crucial feature is that by introducing the aesthetic dimension, place becomes demarcated by the range of perception. This restricts its scope in any instance to the particular context of perceptual experience. Place in this sense, then, applies only to a complex field of perceptual experience involving person and setting, together with the range of historical and cultural influences, knowledge, and meaning that color our perception of that field. This is a critical point for our purposes, since it confines the aesthetics of place to contexts that embody direct experience, such as a room, home, building, street, square, or neighborhood, and only derivatively and by extension to a city, region, or country. The same point applies to identifying places in a natural setting. This demarcation, moreover, is never sharp, for when the scope of an environment extends beyond perception that is immediate and direct, its vividness decreases as its scope increases from, say, a neighborhood to an entire town, a province, or a country. Perhaps another way of recognizing this difference is to distinguish between place and environment. Environment is by far the wider concept. While it includes place, the range of its denotation can extend from the local to the cosmic.

The most general meaning of place as aesthetic, then, is a particular perceptual environment that joins a distinctive identity and coherence with a memorable character, and with which we engage attentively and actively. An authentic sense of place, expressed in Heideggerian language, involves ‘being inside and belonging to your place both as an individual and as a member of a community, and to know this without reflecting upon it’.  

Sacred space

Central in searching for the heart of place is identifying the human role. As with the concept of environment, place is usually understood as related to but distinct from the human participant. Karjalainen takes as basic the notion that ‘places provide human beings with a framework for
environmental involvement’. Both people and places make a contribution: ‘Palpable landscapes and impalpable mindscapes continually intermingle and form internal relations with each other’.\textsuperscript{12} True as this characterization is, it does not entirely grasp what is exceptional about our most compelling experiences of place. This is where the idea of sacred space can serve as a guiding beacon. Let us develop the idea of an aesthetics of place, then, not from the outside, carefully adding traits to the most general conditions of what constitutes place in order to arrive at a highly refined notion, but from inside the experience, as it were. And it is here that sacred space can serve as a powerful exemplar of the aesthetic in place. In sacred space, we find a touchstone from which to consider its other meanings and uses.\textsuperscript{13}

Although I shall begin by citing some instances of sacred places, I do this with some reluctance because examples will inevitably suggest the idea that ‘place’ is a physical location. As fully aesthetic, it becomes an environmental event that fuses participant and location in an aesthetic field. But for the moment, it will be helpful to mention briefly the physical location of some of the most well-known sacred places. One is the Louvre, with its spreading magnificence of scale, structure, space. Another is the Guggenheim Museum, with its spiral exterior form and its ascending and descending spiraling interior space. The Piazza San Marco is probably the most famous of squares, with its articulated sides, active surfaces, and embracing but unconfining boundaries. The form of the Gothic cathedral is for many the physical embodiment of the religious sacred, joining the individual worshiper with the community and the transcendent order of things.\textsuperscript{14}

Sacredness, however, lies not in the physical place but in the significance that people assign to it. ‘Sacredness’ is a human designation and even here we find a range of meanings. In its most pallid sense, a sacred place may refer to land valued not for commercial reasons but because it is most beautiful, most healthy, most productive.\textsuperscript{15} Generally, however, we concentrate considerably more normative significance on the idea than this.

The concept of the sacred can refer to a place, to an experience, or to something more complex: place experience. In associating the sacred with aesthetic experience, Hepburn identifies a strong perceptual focus, the recognition that things have more than utilitarian value but a
condition ‘where we can find ... modes of being other than our own’, together with respect, reverence, and wonder. This last conveys a religious-metaphysical meaning: the sense of humility and awe toward something that has intrinsic value.\textsuperscript{16}

A place may be sacred because it is invested with great personal meaning, perhaps where an event of life-changing proportions occurred. Or, more modestly, it may be a place precious to us because it is where we can come in touch with our deepest layers. A sacred place may have irresistible force through its social or cultural significance. Yet the personal and social are themselves not clearly distinguishable, for our social experiences resonate deep in our most private thoughts, and the cultural process that shapes our language, speech, comportment, and goals forms that person we call our self.

But whatever the primary source of its reverential significance, a place becomes sacred by its power to assimilate a person, producing a synthesis of space, physical features, and the dynamic, conscious body. Often we recognize this occurrence by a feeling of wonder and even breathless awe. Part of this comes from the rarity of such a self-transcending event. Such an experience of place resembles our encounter with the noblest works of art, whose force overwhelms and engulfs those who engage with it. I call this experience of appreciative immersion ‘aesthetic engagement’, the perceptual experience of total absorption in the work at hand. Moreover, it serves equally well to describe the most compelling experiences both of the so-called fine arts and of environment. A sacred place in the fullest sense, then, offers the willing participant a high degree of aesthetic engagement and engenders an experience that is intensely positive: As we expand beyond our finite boundaries, we may be overcome by a pervasive benignity conjoined with a sense of humility at the power such a situation generates.

Our world has been gifted with many artists who, in their works, have created the conditions for experiencing the sacred. Such occasions occur in all the arts. Music is a particularly rich source of this, and it is an art whose auditory properties can convey the spatial and architectural characteristics we associate with place. Some works announce this quality at their very beginning, such as the Fauré Requiem, Beethoven’s Ninth, and the Sibelius Violin Concerto,
while others develop it cumulatively, as in Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* and Handel’s *Messiah*. Among the many instances from the arts of space and volume, my most overwhelming encounters of the aesthetic sacred have been with Brancusi’s *Endless Column* and the Rothko Chapel. The last of these is a powerful illustration of a place explicitly designed to be sacred. Here, the force that the Chapel evokes is almost palpable as one approaches and enters it. These various examples, however, are only the *signs* of possible sacred occasions. They are reminders of what one may experience when engaging with those works. For such an experience to occur, a ready participant must join an evocative object in a compelling situation.

Sacred places offer a guide to what gives ‘place’ its special quality and force. Of course the world is mostly made up of less than sacred places. But their leading features — the full perceptual engagement of a perceiver with a location that possesses identity and coherence in a seamless unity of experience — these lie at the center of place. On less profound occasions they occur with weaker intensity. Yet however vivid it may be, the peculiar force of this experience of place lies in the fact that ‘we do not grasp space only by our senses ... we live in it, we project our personality into it, we are tied to it by emotional bonds; space is not just perceived ... it is lived’. We can discover the aesthetic in the ordinary locations that bind us to them, and these place locations may occur on different scales. They may be a town common, a public building, a traditional path, or a room distinguished by strong emotional or use associations. Others may be a traditional beach, a hill or mountain, or a monument that stands as a focal point of local identity. A place may perhaps even be an empty lot in a city neighborhood that exhibits little of the beauty of a landscaped garden but, for a local child, holds the wonder and charm of a realm of fantasy and adventure. Such locations as these can provide the circumstances that can encourage something of the aesthetic engagement that sacred places have the capacity to evoke so forcefully. Wherever it be, the aesthetic experience of place is one of inhabitation, of ‘dwelling’, to use Heidegger’s term.

It is important to recall the dimension of meaning that contributes to this kind of experience. Place locations often possess a certain resonance as a repository of social, cultural, or personal significance. Traces of the past that are visible in a townscape form a kind of materialized
memory. Walter Benjamin developed this idea in relation to Paris. He saw Paris and its arcades as the past materialized in space. They are the embodiment of a collective memory, and an historical index marks the date when these sights became legible. Place is thus not only a topographical-geographical designation but one that also embodies meaning: the city, one’s body, and psychological space interpenetrate. Memory may even confer an enhanced presence on a location that is otherwise undistinguished. Material form, sensuous apprehension, and social or personal significance can together create the special perceptual experience of aesthetic engagement that distinguishes place from simple geographical location.

**Designing place**

Exploring the idea of place in this way leads to some curious questions and even more curious answers. For example, is ‘place’ a personal designation or a communal one? Surely we must acknowledge the public status in the location of many of our most striking experiences of place. On the other hand, if place is not simply a location but the *experience* of one, then it is necessary to think of place as something that depends on the presence and participation of people. It then identifies a particular sort of environmental encounter. So the question of whether place is personal or communal can be answered in the affirmative in both cases: Place may be a communal designation for locations commonly experienced in the significant way we have described. But at the same time, place is ultimately an experiential event, and thus its referent is a contextual human situation centered in personal experience.

Another question is its locus. Does place require a physical location or can it be non-physical? Can the electronic space of the computer take on the attributes of place? Is there cyberplace in cyberspace? These questions are correlative with the issues discussed in the last chapter, and how they are answered obviously depends on one’s definition of place. If place requires a physical location, then clearly no place is possible in cyberspace. That would please many, since the view is common that the computer constructs a fictitious world in which nothing is
real but only virtual. If, on the other hand, we define place as a location with which we become assimilated in aesthetic experience, then it may be that place does indeed exist in cyberspace. The same total absorption that people used to experience when they still read novels is now common with the computer. The work being done in creating domains of virtual reality has great significance, for many of the same questions that can be asked about actual, or better yet, common sense reality, can also be posed here. The possibility of constructing cyberplace has applications in areas in addition to the virtual world of computer games, such as virtual archaeology. But irrespective of where it is located, the human component is critical.

Questions about the locus of place do not appear only in relation to technology. Similar questions can be asked about dream space and imagined space, as we have already seen in our discussion of virtuality. There is something to be gained in explanatory force with a definition of place that is not earthbound. It may be that some of our most vivid and compelling experiences of place occur in space that is imaginary or that inhabits dreams. This may be taken as a comment on the spaces in which many of us live in industrialized environments, spaces at the least not memorable and that often provide what is perhaps our most common experience of location, placelessness. For the obverse side to the meaning of place is found in built environments that are inauthentic, that have no distinctive identity and evoke experiences that are pallid or superficial. This leads us to ask whether a location that goes beyond the bland and becomes offensive or ugly can be experienced as a place: Is ‘Greasy Lake’ a sacred place?

Despite the repugnance with which we may hold the scene that Coraghessan Boyle describes in his unusual story, it does, in fact, meet the criteria developed earlier in the discussion of place. The three youths in the story are sensitive to the compelling quality of Greasy Lake. They are caught up in its spirit, lose their sense of discrete selfhood, and engage in wild, impulsive, aggressive behavior that exactly carries out meanings embodied in that place. But of course there is nothing edifying in the self-transcendence they experience. Their response to the powerful force that the lake exercises on them is hardly positive but just the contrary. So, then, what kind of place
is Greasy Lake?

One of the many confusions to which the term ‘aesthetic’ gives rise is the assumption that it denotes experiences that enrich and perhaps ennoble those who can engage in the special, highly valued perceptual situations we call aesthetic. This reflects a confusion because the very same qualities we call by that name – an intense sensory presence; directly felt, resonant meaning; and expanded awareness – can, on the other side of the scale, be offensive and possibly harmful. An aesthetic standard can be applied with equal effectiveness to failures of taste and to anaesthetized or oppressed sensibilities. Aesthetic perception is involved here, but it is frustrated, offended, even damaged. Rather than exclude such experiences from the realm of the aesthetic and therefore render them immune to critical aesthetic judgment, it seems far better to include them in an all-embracing aesthetic but to regard them as occupying the negative side of a scale of aesthetic value. What is at work, then, is a negative aesthetic, one that shifts experience below the level of neutral ground and into ‘the all-encompassing darkness’ mentioned before, into the nether regions of negative value. Negative place thus differs from placelessness. It is experience of the dark side of place and, in its own way, testifies to the power that place exercises on its inhabitants.

Greasy Lake appears, then, to be an ‘anti-sacred’ place, forcefully exhibiting the negation of many of the features of the sacred. But it may be too hasty to write it off as an aesthetic failure. Does Greasy Lake indeed possess a negative aesthetic? Our dismay at the events in the story, at their violence, sexuality, anger, and fear, is indeed not so much an aesthetic concern as a moral one. Moreover, discomfort and even fear are also compatible with a positive aesthetic: Witness the long fascination with the sublime. So perhaps our discomfiture with Greasy Lake raises ethical issues more than aesthetic ones. In its forceful presence and transcendent power, Greasy Lake may indeed be an aesthetic success.

Where, then, do negative places appear, if Greasy Lake is not one of them? While some places may be as forceful in their own way as Greasy Lake is in its, the aesthetic of most, whether positive or negative, does not quite achieve the power of the sacred and many fall well short of this. Yet that may, in fact, make negative places all the more insidious. Perhaps in its emptiness of
all character, we may see placelessness as falling flat on the neutral center of the scale. From this point on down the ladder of negativity we can find many familiar failures, from the depressing anonymity of suburban streets to the oppressive hyperstimulation of shopping malls, from the vulgarity of commercial strips to the raw devastation of strip mines.

Interestingly, placeless or negative places may in time metamorphose into rewarding places through physical or conceptual changes. Levittown has changed from a development of anonymous regularity into an area of architectural variety and local pride. Some regard the architectural design of Las Vegas not as a display of vulgar sensationalism but as a vibrant beacon of vitality.

Place, then, is not a physical location, nor is it a state of mind. Rather it is the engagement of the conscious body with the conditions of a specific location. This brings us to the further question of how this understanding of the aesthetics of place affects the making of place.

From what has been said here, we can infer that the goal of good place design is to create locations that convey a touch of the sacred. Such designs need not necessarily be profound but they must nonetheless have a significant presence. This is as much an artistic as a technological task. In fact, it engages science in the service of art. For no glib formula can achieve place, this being a sure prescription for the failures we find in such conventions as the mechanistic emulation of the international style or the clichés of postmodern architectural design, such as the Palladian window. Not only is there no convenient recipe for place-making, but the abstract visual techniques that are the stock-in-trade of architectural design, such as the plan, elevation, parti, model, and computer-generated simulations, are at best partial and often misleading.

For place to be aesthetically successful, designers must develop their perceptual capacities, including kinesthetic consciousness, the somatic apprehension of mass and spatial awareness, the sensory recognition of volumes and textures, auditory acuteness, and the richly complex sensibility of synaesthetic perception. Each site, each project, each situation is different, and a sensitivity to the possibilities inherent in its unique features will help in designing distinctive and authentic places. It would be valuable, too, I think, for designers to acquire a phenomenological perspective
– an intense awareness of the actual direct experience of sites and structures – and to learn to convert this into a sensitivity to the creative possibilities of specific locations. For it is in working through such experience that real places may emerge.\textsuperscript{28} We should follow ‘... an approach that is responsive to local structures of meaning and experience, to particular situations and to the variety of levels of meaning of place; an approach that takes its inspiration from the existential significance of place, the need that many people have for a profound attachment to places, and the ontological principles of dwelling and sparing identified by Heidegger. Such an approach cannot provide precise solutions to clearly defined problems, but, proceeding from an appreciation of the significance of place and the particular activities and local situations, it would perhaps provide a way of outlining some of the main directions and possibilities, thus allowing scope for individuals and groups to make their own places, and to give those places authenticity and significance by modifying them and by dwelling in them’. Relph, p.146. Like any art, place design combines technical mastery with aesthetic sensibility.

Place design may be compared with architectural design, in fact it can be considered to encompass it, for architecture is part of the larger endeavor to create human places. All these efforts demand the same combination of art and science and all possess the same vulnerability to prosaic formulas. Most important, they offer the same opportunity to create conditions in the world in which people can be at home. Like architecture, place design creates the conditions for dwelling.

Art, whatever more it may be, is at its etymological base the skill in making something. All the arts construct the conditions for intrinsic experience. If the design of place is to be an art, its goal must be that of all the arts: the shaping of experience that is richly rewarding. A poetics of place must put the aesthetic in place.
NOTES

1 This chapter is revised from ‘The Aesthetic in Place’, in Constructing Place, ed. Sarah Menin (New York: Routledge, 2003), Ch.1, pp. 41-54, and is reprinted by permission.
8 ‘In this cultural environment, people are embedded in their world. We are implicated in a constant process of action and response from which it is not possible to stand apart. A physical interaction of body and setting, a psychological interconnection of consciousness and culture, a dynamic harmony of sensory awareness all make a person inseparable from his or her environmental situation. Traditional dualisms, such as those separating idea and object, self and others, inner consciousness and external world, all dissolve in the integration of person and place. A new conception of the human being thus emerges. Humans are seen as organic, conscious, social organisms, experiential nodes that are both the product and the generator of environmental
9 J. Douglas Porteous, ‘Intimate Sensing’, Area 18, 250-251. See also Karjalainen, op. cit.
11 Relph, op. cit., p.65.

In the context of a discussion of the sacred, it is common to speak of sacred space. However, space is both too abstract a term and too diaphanous to adequately denote the particularity and materiality of those locations where we experience the sacred. The discussion that follows, then, will center on the notion of a place as sacred.


These are discussed in Arnold Berleant, Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), pp. 167-169.


See Frances Downing, Remembrance and the Design of Place (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2000).

William Gibson, who is considered to have coined the term ‘cyberspace’ in his novel Neuromancer, ‘created a world in which information can be accessed via neurally wired maps that interconnect with the world-wide lattice of information flow, which registers the user’s / immer sant’s location within the system’. Richard K. Merritt, ‘From Memory Arts to the New Code Paradigm: The Artist as Engineer of Virtual Information Space and Virtual Experience’, Leonardo 34, 5 (2001), p. 405.

Software designers have made this explicit. There are several online computer role-playing games that establish virtual worlds. One of the most ambitious is Sony’s game, EverQuest, whose half a million subscribers inhabit a virtual world called Norrath. The strong communities that develop around these games enter into commercial systems that use an internal currency. Yet these often spill out into the ‘real’ world through internet auction sites where digital goods

23 A consortium of university researchers and private firms is developing life-size virtual reality applications, including haptic tools to enable one to feel draperies, clothing and structural surfaces. This is being applied to the virtual reconstruction of archeological sites, for example the ninth century B.C.E. palace of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal. See *UB Today*, Winter 2002; also http://www.classics.buffalo.edu/htm/; UBVirtualSiteMuseum/summaryNimrud.htm; and http://www.learningsites.com/NWPalace/NWPalhome.html

24 See Patricia Donovan, ‘Digital Archaeology’, in *UB Today*, Winter 2002, pp.18-21. Further information can be found on the following web sites:
http://www.classics.buffalo.edu/htm/UBVirtualSiteMuseum/summaryNimrud.htm
http://www.learningsites.com/NWPalace/NWPalhome.html


26 This, of course, only mentions a large and important issue about which I have written elsewhere but which would deflect us from our main purpose here to pursue farther. See ‘The Human Touch and the Beauty of Nature’, in *Living in the Landscape*, Ch. 4.

27 Residents of Levittown have protested against raised ranches because they are seen as destroying the historic character of the area.

28 ‘You should never plan a road if you haven’t visited the place many times. It is not enough to go there once ....You should go in different moods. You should go when you’re drunk, and try the feeling of how it is to sing in the forest. You should go the following day when you have a hangover. You should go when your heart is broken ....Then perhaps you know if you can build that road or not’. Risto Lotvonen, resident of Hyvinkää, quoted in Pauline von Bonsdorff, ed., *Ymparistoestikan Polkuja (Paths of Environmental Aesthetics)* (International Institute of Applied Aesthetics Series, Vol. 2, Jyväskylä: Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy, 1966), p.130. Also mentioned by Emily Brady, ‘The Aesthetics of the Natural Environment’, in V. Pratt et al., eds. *Environment and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.159.
Chapter IX

EMBODIED MUSIC

‘Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from what Blake calls mathematic form, from every abstract thing, from all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories, and sensations of the body.’

William Butler Yeats

Critique of ‘body’

Western philosophy has long been dominated by a tradition of subjectivism that finds expression — ‘expression’ is itself a sign of that tendency — in a whole vocabulary of mentalistic terms and their cognates, terms such as ‘meaning’, ‘feeling’, ‘intention’, ‘self’, ‘consciousness’, and, of course, ‘mind’. For many, this tradition is the whole of philosophy. It has become more rather than less widespread in philosophical practice as the material world — as this is understood by science, technology, and economics equally — has come to dominate social and political life.

This is not to dismiss such concepts and interests, for they represent many important issues that need to be considered. I want, however, to challenge the larger context in which they occur. It is my view that subjective or mentalistic presuppositions cannot help but deeply color both the direction and outcome of query. Philosophical idealism has been a powerful force and it has dominated much of philosophy in the West, as well as in the East. What is most important in philosophical inquiry, however, is to plant both our feet on foundation stones that rest on the firmest ground, that make the fewest assumptions, and that are embedded in the clearest and strongest evidence available.

A counter-tendency has arisen in our day that leads away from largely mentalistic
philosophy and the powerful influence of subjectivistic doctrines toward philosophical discussion that gravitates to its opposite pole. Instead of being preoccupied with nuances of thought, meaning, feeling, and the intricate byways of consciousness, many philosophers now talk of body and, under the influence of Merleau-Ponty, of the flesh. More recently, Wolfgang Welsch has found in our bodies a condition for every operation. Philosophically the body acts as a counter-balance against the immaterial influences of the electronic media, and he cites Lyotard, Dreyfus, Virilio, and Baudrillard, who find in the body a similar salubrious force. But for Welsch the body is more than this. Our bodies possess a certain sovereignty, an obstinacy in the face of the pervasive influences of the media. They offer a point of stability against the subtle power over us of the electronic worlds.3

This turn toward the body is welcome. It works as a corrective to philosophical and cultural immaterialism. Perhaps it is part of the obsession of both our commercial culture and the counterculture with cultivating the body as an object, especially an erotic object. From a philosophical perspective, a philosophy of the body may be a historical emergent, provoked by some of the social developments of our time — post-Modernism's challenge to the canon of received truths, feminism's confrontation with patriarchal power and the pieties that both mask and enforce that power, and the materialism both of scientific research and of the consumer economy.

This focus on the body is, then, a positive development. ‘Body’ draws our attention to things that have traditionally been overlooked in philosophy. Yet to speak of ‘body’ is as one-sided as it is to speak of ‘mind’. What would we think of a journal called Body? By the same token, what should we think of a journal called Mind, as if you could understand body without mind or mind without body? Indeed, what are either of these but historically grounded fictional constructs that reflect and encourage conceptual divisiveness, a persistent Cartesianism that, in dividing the question, settles nothing but rather originates problems of its own?

Unfortunately, much of Western philosophy remains mired in the dualistic premises of seventeenth and eighteenth century science, and it has failed to reconstruct itself in the mode of
twentieth century physics and biology. Cartesian dualism is itself one of the consequences of idealism. It flourishes everywhere, despite significant alternatives that have appeared over the past century and a half, from Marx to Merleau-Ponty to Justus Buchler and beyond. Indeed, that recent intellectual oddity, the philosophy of mind, rests firmly on this idealistic tradition.

Can we even speak of either mind or body without the one entailing the other? They are, at the very least, complementary terms. What is meant, for example, by speaking of ‘my body’? Who or what is this ‘my’, the ‘owner’ of this body? And what is the difference between speaking of ‘my body’ and speaking of ‘my hand’, ‘my leg’, ‘my head’? Who is the ‘I’ that is the personal referent in all of these instances, the ‘I’ who possesses the arm, the foot, the body? Is the owner of the arm or foot different from the owner of the body? Perhaps ‘body’, together with its owner, are less material or ontological entities than what anthropologists call folk categories dressed up in academic robes, like many other philosophically sanctioned concepts.

The anthropological term ‘folk category’, in spite of its potential significance, is little known in philosophical discourse. It refers to the claim that every society operates with conceptual models. ‘A society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves .... It is the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them.’ Ward H. Goodenough, ‘Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics’, in Report of the 7th Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Study, Paul L. Garvin, ed. Monograph Series on Languages and Linguistics No. 9, Institute of Languages and Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, pp. 167-168. Quoted in Robert A. Manners and David Kaplan, eds., Theory in Anthropology, A Sourcebook (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), p. 476. See also Ward H. Goodenough, Description and Comparison in Cultural Anthropology (Chicago: Aldine, 1970), p. 104.

Some philosophical extensions of the traditional notion of body
In attempting to free ourselves from what may be false problems, it will help to consider some different extensions of the traditional notion of body as a material object. The first of these is the Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida's concept of the historical body. The use of tools under historical (i.e. cultural) conditions demonstrates the primary union of subject and object that is basic to Nishida's philosophy. *Techn*, the act of making things with tools, does not confine itself to the subject. It consists in penetrating into things and, in the process of things, becoming ours. ‘Taking tools in hand, the human being finds himself already in the world of historical life’. As we make things with tools, we act in the historical world. Action presupposes desire, which comes from our body, but at the same time it is influenced by historical conditions. Making things, then, is acting bodily, and this Nishida regards as a subjective-objective historical fact. ‘Our bodies are historical in two senses. First, they intervene historically in the world, and make things; at the same time, they are historical because they are already formed through history’.7

Merleau-Ponty develops a similar reciprocity in exploring the subtle insinuation between seeing and the visible and between touching and the touched.8 He finds in the reversibility of each of these pairs ‘the claim that the flesh of the world perceives itself though our flesh which is one with it’. In a telling metaphor, he calls the body ‘a charged field’.9 ‘Charged field’ is a pregnant phrase. It suggests energy that reaches out, not ‘out’, for that implies its complement ‘in’, but rather it envisions the pervasiveness of energy. The body is a concentration of forces and is part of a larger field. In this reciprocity of perceiving-perceived, which Merleau-Ponty associates with *Einfühlung*, we are in the object we are describing, we are of it. ‘My body is made of the same flesh as the world ....’10 Yet at the same time as he asserts a continuity between my flesh and the flesh of the world, he comes close to subjectivism when he takes the body as the *Nullpunkt*, the point from which the world is measured.11

Then there are the ways in which the body speaks to things and things speak to the body. Some writers refer to bodily intentionality, found not only through movement but from the thought of movement, as well.12 The notion of bodily intentionality nicely fuses thought, action
and object. Coming at this mutual magnetism of body, thought, and object, we have already seen how the psychologist J. J. Gibson speaks of the ‘affordances’ of things for behavior. ‘To perceive is to be aware of the surfaces of the environment and of oneself in it. The interchange between hidden and unhidden surfaces is essential to this awareness’.13

**Body and environment**

The idea of environment perhaps most fully encompasses the rich contextual field of human experience. Not only does the concept of body need to be reconfigured; its very boundaries must be redrawn. Our concept of body is changing and we can no longer easily demarcate its borders. Biological ecology has grown into cultural ecology, as we continue to enlarge the complex interlocking dimensions of the human context. Environment embraces the recognition that body is contextual still more — organically, conceptually, and ontologically. Not only is body known in its setting but it finds its existence, its meaning, and its being in and through its context. No body stands alone.

Most important for humans is the cultural environment. Awareness is growing of the fact that no body exists without culture, and that culture shapes the body in specific ways. Moreover, we cannot speak of the body as such but only of particular bodies that constitute different ways of being in the world — in different physical environments, in different social environments, and in different historical cultures. The cultural environment profoundly influences body size, facial expression, deportment, and movement — such as a person's walk — and profoundly affects such features as hair style and dress. Dress, for example, is not just the body's image but a part of body, not its external skin, but the outermost layer of all that lies beneath it — size, height, bulk, feelings, and ideas about one's bodily self. Food is a central part of psycho-social life, an active synthesis of body, belief, feeling, and attitude. Grasping the idea that body is environmental, then, sets us in a different direction. It takes the body as thoroughly contextual.14

With all this, then, what can we make of an aesthetics of the body? If we cannot speak of
the body as such, what can we say about an aesthetics of the body? To say that beauty can be located in the body is no less absurd than to pontificate that it lies in the beholder's mind. Is there a non-dualistic alternative? Can there be an aesthetics of the person? That may be a more interesting question. Perhaps in exploring the engagement of the whole person in the world we can begin to illuminate an integrated, holistic human aesthetic. In the discussion that follows, reference to 'body' is entirely metaphorical. More specifically, 'body' is used synecdochically, as a part that is indissolubly bound to an integral whole, the human person.

One way to speak of the body from this environmental standpoint is to forego the word 'body' altogether and talk only of 'embodiment'. 'Embodiment' is preferable to 'body' because it incorporates, literally ‘brings the body into’, the context of his or her cultural, social, historical, and personal experience, experience that holds as many dimensions of consciousness as it does of materiality.

**Music as embodied**

Let me give this general picture a particular setting, an artistic one. When one experiences any art appreciatively, what occurs is no wholly personal, subjective, unique, and esoteric event but a fulfillment of the rich and complex capacities one possesses as a human person situated at a particular time, place, and circumstance. In this sense all art is situated and embodied as a transactional process involving the whole person.

To think of art, however, as an object, i.e. a painting, a piece of music, a poem, fragments what is an integral process. From whatever place in the aesthetic field we start, whether it be the artist, object, appreciator, or performer, the other factors have a quiet presence. Thus the active, physical process of producing the living art is embedded in the work and the traces of that activity become part of the experience of appreciation. The brush strokes in a painting are not merely surface irregularities but the tangible signs of the brush, the hand that held it, and the artist in whom these were conjoined. Color tonalities are not just surface qualities but were
chosen, just as a line, as Fry pointed out, is the record of a gesture. In a similar way, musical sounds are more than auditory sensations; they are produced in some way, executed by the bow of a stringed instrument, a person’s breath into a woodwind or brass instrument, the movement of fingers on piano keys, or hands and feet on the organ. The singing voice emerges from a person and a social presence underlies call-and-response singing and work songs, just as spatial distance is inherent in the sound of antiphonal music.

Dance quite literally embodies music. Most dance is done to music or other sound, perhaps in part a consequence of its somatic effects. Ethnic dancing, for example, is inseparable from cultural styles in music and musical instruments. National dance traditions in Europe, such as the Balkan, Scandinavian, Turkish, and English, are distinctive and strikingly different from one another. The same can be said of African, Asian, and Native American dancing. Even when diverse traditions are combined, as in Candomblé, a syncretic ecstatic religion in Brazil, the music, chanting, and dance become yet another singular amalgam.15 In the West, music written to be danced to, from the minuet to the waltz to disco, may find its way into other musical traditions, from Bach's instrumental and orchestral suites to Bartók's Dance Suite. Lastly, music not written for dancing may be translated into bodily movement, as in Balanchine's Double Concerto choreographed to Bach's Concerto for Two Violins and his Symphonie Concertante to Mozart's work of that same name for violin and viola. Even ‘quiet’ listening engages the body subliminally.

But music in dance does not just enter and activate our bodies. Its range is more diffuse still, spreading out to engulf the space in which it occurs. We can think of the space defined by the dominating presence of sound as ‘sound space’. Musical listening thus is bodily engagement with sound in a setting. Embodied music is, then, actually environmental: body-sound-space.

Music does not exist unless it is embodied. The ear is always involved: the ear of the listener guided by the ear of the performer, which, in turn, is guided by the ear of the composer, much as, in painting, the eye of the artist is invariably present in the painting. Because music always occurs as an event and usually first as a performance, bodily involvement is necessary.
Even in electronic music, the composer actively fashions the sounds in a way comparable to a performer in a recording session.

Further, the actual performance of music demands far more than fingers, arms, lips, or tongue: Playing an instrument engages the entire body. One senses the sound entering one's body; one can feel the sound vibrations going through to the feet. Madeline Bruser emphasizes that the performer ‘become[s] saturated with [the vibrations], achieving direct contact with the living texture of music. The mind of the composer lives in [the performer’s] body’.\textsuperscript{16} (Shades of dualism!) Sudnow's account of Jimmy Rowles's jazz piano playing bears this out: ‘I watched him ... move from chord to chord with a broadly swaying participation of his shoulders and entire torso, watched him delineate waves of movement, some broadly encircling, other subdividing the broadly undulating strokes with finer rotational movements, so that as his arm reached out to get from one chord to another it was as if some spot on his back, for example, circumscribed a small circle at the same time ....’\textsuperscript{17} The pianist and scholar Charles Rosen has written of how the entire body of the pianist engages in producing every crescendo and decrescendo. The physical instrument itself exerts an attraction on the pianist, who feels a physical need for contact with the keyboard.

Moreover, the sonorities and other traits of the instrument influence and affect the composer and the listener, as well.\textsuperscript{18} Our auditory imagination becomes actively involved, supplementing the decaying sound of a piano tone, contributing to the sounds that are actually heard, and hearing the inaudible by sometimes supplying notes that are unheard. In his late writings, Barthes speaks of the listener as a reader performing the music, indeed, composing it a second time. Rosen makes a similar point: ‘The listener must constantly alter, purify, and supplement what he hears in the interests of musical intelligibility and expressiveness, taking his cue from what is implied by the performer’.\textsuperscript{19} Also, ‘The romantic “heart”, an excorated metaphor, is a powerful organ, extreme point of the interior body where, simultaneously and as though contradictorily, desire and tenderness, the claims of love and the summons of pleasure, violently merge: something raises my body, swells it, stretches it, bears it to the verge of
explosion, and immediately, mysteriously, depresses it, weakens it. This movement must be perceived *beneath* the melodic line; this line is pure and, even at the climax of melancholy, always utters the euphoria of the unified body; but it is caught up in a phonic volume which often complicates and contradicts it...’ , Roland Barthes, ‘The Romantic Song’, in *The Responsibility of Forms* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), p. 289. Also, ‘The romantic “heart”, an excorated metaphor, is a powerful organ, extreme point of the interior body where, simultaneously and as though contradictorily, desire and tenderness, the claims of love and the summons of pleasure, violently merge: something raises my body, swells it, stretches it, bears it to the verge of explosion, and immediately, mysteriously, depresses it, weakens it. This movement must be perceived *beneath* the melodic line; this line is pure and, even at the climax of melancholy, always utters the euphoria of the unified body; but it is caught up in a phonic volume which often complicates and contradicts it ....’ Roland Barthes, ‘The Romantic Song’, in *The Responsibility of Forms* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), p. 289. In a live performance, the body is engaged with focused intensity.

The Western obsession with objects — objects that subjects use, control, or possess — extends to art. We easily identify art with visual objects such as paintings and sculptures, and with literary ones such as novels and poems. Doing this in the performing arts may seem somewhat more difficult but it does not deter the theoretical imagination. Thus dance becomes ballet, and theater, plays. Locating the musical object may seem more awkward still. The problem seems to fascinate some philosophers but does not deter audiences, who find it entertaining to focus their attention on the gyrations of conductors and the gestures of soloists. The object-centered focus of art has a powerful grip on our understanding and an exclusive hold on our attention.

I have tried to show that such a focus is partial and misleading. Argument may not be powerful enough to dislodge the rigid grip of convention. Let me turn, therefore, to two examples, a literary one that both states the multi-dimensional character of music directly and exemplifies it in practice, and a musical one that exemplifies musical embodiment on many
levels and with unusual richness.

Wallace Stevens, ‘Peter Quince at the Clavier’

The poems of Wallace Stevens, a major American poet of the mid-twentieth century, are subtle joinings of an unusual poetic sensibility with a powerful intelligence that expands to embrace a metaphysical domain. Stevens exhibits these characteristics through the musical theme of ‘Peter Quince at the Clavier’\(^2\). The poem shifts constantly in denotation and metaphor from spirit to body to flesh. At first this might seem to be inadvertent ambiguity or abject confusion. That, I think, is quite mistaken. The poem embodies not confusion but rather a fusion, the deliberate recognition of their continuity and inseparability: Music as heard, felt, and then remembered joins spirit and body in an indissoluble unity.

Analyzing the poem from this standpoint shows that fusion clearly. In what follows, the words in **bold face** denote references to music, the terms *underscored* are references to the body, and those in *italics* may be understood as manifestations of consciousness.

Peter Quince at the Clavier

I

Just as my **fingers** on these **keys**

Make **music**, so the selfsame **sounds**

On *my spirit* make a **music**, too.

**Music** is **feeling**, then, not **sound**;

And thus it is that what I **feel**,

Here in this room, **desiring** you,

Thinking of **your blue-shadowed silk**,

Is **music**. It is like the **strain**

Waked in the elders by Susanna.

Of a green evening, clear and warm,

She **bathed** in her still garden, while

The **red-eyed elders watching**, felt

The **basses** of their **beings throbbing**

In witching **chords**, and their thin **blood**

**Pulse pizzicati** of **Hosanna**.

II

In the green water, clear and warm,
Susanna lay.
She searched
The touch of springs,
And found
Concealed imaginings.
She sighed,
For so much melody.

Upon the bank, she stood
In the cool
Of spent emotions.
She felt, among the leaves,
The dew
Of old devotions.

She walked upon the grass,
Still quavering.
The winds were like her maids,
On timid feet,
Fetching her woven scarves,
Yet wavering.

A breath upon her hand
Muted the night.
She turned —
A cymbal crashed,
And roaring horns.

III
Soon, with a noise like tambourines,
Came her attendant Byzantines.
They wondered why Susanna cried
Against the elders by her side;
And as they whispered, the refrain
Was like a willow swept by rain.
Anon, their lamps' uplifted flame
Revealed Susanna and her shame.

And then, the simpering Byzantines
Fled, with a noise like tambourines.

IV
Beauty is momentary in the mind —
The fitful tracing of a portal;
But in the flesh it is immortal.

The body dies; the body's beauty lives.
So evenings die, in their green going,
A wave, interminably flowing.
So gardens die, their meek breath scenting
The cowl of winter, done repenting.
So *maidens die*, to the auroral Celebration of a maiden's *choral*.

Susanna's *music touched* the *bawdy strings* Of those white *elders*; but escaping,

Left only Death's ironic *scraping*.

Now, in its immortality, it *plays* On the clear *viol* of her *memory,*

And makes a constant *sacrament of praise*.

Although one might debate specific designations, the general picture that emerges from this kind of analysis is striking. Of the 331 words in the poem, 34 denote features or qualities of music, 56 of the body, and 10 of consciousness. Two words combine two of these. And these multiple dimensions are distributed throughout the poem. Here poetry synthesizes with understated eloquence what philosophers have struggled unsuccessfully to separate.

**Debussy's *La Cathédrale engloutie***

Stevens's musical trope displays body and consciousness as an unbroken whole. It is a brilliant recognition of the remarkable force with which music is able to engage us as integral human beings. What this poem about music exhibits in the evocative medium of language, music itself does directly and immediately. Although I believe this is true of all music, irrespective of genre, a particularly eloquent illustration of the rich complexity of musical embodiment, joining together many facets of human being in a seamless flow of sound, is Claude Debussy's Prelude No. X for piano called retrospectively, *La Cathédrale engloutie* or *The Sunken Cathedral*.

For the sake of clarity, I have grouped my comments on this work around several different centers: cultural association, sound, performance, and musical knowledge, although obviously in the live act of listening they are fused together. Cultural association begins the discussion because, in this particular piece, it pervades many of the other factors. While it comes first here, in the performance of the piece it is actually made explicit last, for the title of the
prelude, relating the piano's chords to the muffled bells of a cathedral, appears at the end of the printed score rather than at the beginning. The explanation usually given is that Debussy did not want the audience to listen to the music as an illustration of the scene but rather to grasp it directly by ear. It is interesting that, in describing how this occurs, we are led to make use of bodily referents and metaphors.

Certain sounds are characteristic of impressionist music, a stylistic movement centered in France at the end of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. Among them are the whole tone scale and parallel chords, which include parallel fifths, something carefully avoided in earlier periods. These sounds are especially pronounced in the music of Debussy and nowhere more so than in this prelude. Debussy builds the piece on the intervals of octaves, fifths, fourths, which are produced by inverting fifths, and seconds and ninths, which result from the superposition of fifths. Combining these intervals produces harmonic sequences that are distinctively impressionistic in tonal quality. At the same time they recall the early development in Western ecclesiastical music known as organum (ca. 800-1250), which moved away from monody and toward harmony by adding parallel octaves and fifths.

Octaves, fifths, and fourths, moreover, are the pitches most pronounced in the overtone series. Indeed, the first fifteen bars of this prelude are built entirely on the first three overtones, sounds that lie above the fundamental or principal note but are much weaker: the octave, fifth, and fourth [e.g. G, g, d¹, g¹]. Most of us are oblivious of these faint pitches, but we do hear the richness and resonance they contribute to the note that is directly sounded. These tones are especially pronounced in church bells, whose distinctive ringing reverberation comes from the unusually powerful overtones that are produced when a bell is struck forcefully. Joining the hollow resonance of these harmonic structures with melodic materials that make extensive use of octaves, fifths, fourths, seconds, and ninths, intervals commonly used in the tuning of multiple bells, vividly evokes the distinctive sound of cathedral bells.

Still another, subtle evocation of a cathedral has its basis in memory. Many short phrases are repeated exactly or approximately, and there are several phrases that are symmetrical, like a
palindrome that reads the same backward as it does forward. (In music theory this is called 
cancrizans or crab.) These have the effect of a kind of echo that, together with the
impressionistic use of the damper pedal, which allows successive chords to run together, help create the auditory atmosphere of a cathedral's great resonating space.

Most directly apparent of all is the way in which the body enters into the performance of this (and every) musical work. Not only the hands but the torso, the legs, and feet are involved. The performer feels the physical vibrations of the sound from direct contact with the instrument as well as through the ears, and of course is deeply absorbed in listening as part of the process of guiding the body in producing these sounds on the piano. The sounds spread throughout the space that embraces the pianist and the piano, and engulf the audience in a continuity of space, sound, and bodily presence.

Knowledge is probably the most variable of the factors in musical experience because its influence comes not only from the cultural conditioning of the participant, whether performer or listener, but also from the education, training, past exposure, and other such differences in personal history. Yet knowledge is nonetheless a forceful influence. It functions as a filter through which our perception and engagement in the entire musical situation take place. Not just national traditions but historical styles of composition, performance, and appreciation affect the experience of music, and all of these may be mediated by cognitive structures.

Much of Debussy’s music is a tonal embodiment of its subject. The music does not simply imitate an environmental scene but stands independently of it. The Sea, Clouds, and Gardens in the Rain are like the titles of paintings: they direct appreciation and focus attention evocatively. The titles are not what the music is about; they do not displace it. The notion of a sunken cathedral with tolling bells and resonant organ tones is absurd, a literal impossibility. The work is a musical structure, an imaginative structure, an entirely imaginative environment, a musical environment. It needs the stone edifice less than the cathedral needs its own music to complete the experience. It is embodied music.
Conclusion

The experience of music offers powerful proof of the embeddedness of human being. It is environmental engagement at its highest pitch and thus offers an eloquent argument for the full fusion of human being, a kind of reasoning I call ‘the argument from experience’. When Walter Pater observed that ‘all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music’, he may have been extolling music at the expense of the other arts. But perhaps he recognized that music achieves human embodiment with unusual forcefulness, directness, and immediacy. Yet every art, or rather, every appreciative engagement with art, does something of the same thing, each in its own way. Art thus evokes directly what philosophy has no language to state: the unity of human being and the continuity of our multiple dimensions. By making this aesthetic fusion explicit in aesthetic experience, we can begin to reveal art's ways, perhaps the closest we can come to expressing the unsayable.
NOTES

1 This essay was first published in Environment and the Arts; Perspectives on Art and Environment, ed. A. Berleant (Ashgate, 2002), pp. 143-155 and in TKS, Tidsskrift för kulturstudier, [Journal of Cultural Studies] (Uppsala), 5 (2002), 7-22, and is reprinted by permission.


4 Berel Lang's Mind's Bodies (State University of New York Press, 1995) is an imaginative effort to overcome their separation

5 It is useful to distinguish between 'body' and 'the body.' 'The body' designates an object and is a clinical term. 'Body', in contrast, is personal, not objective. 'Body' always possesses a generalized eroticism, in some fashion, an eroticism that includes among its qualities touch, presence, aura, and movement.

6 ‘There do not exist such independent entities as subject and object .... The opposition of subject-object is rather thought of because we see the things by our acts. The things oppose themselves thoroughly against us, and I called techn object the act that we make things with tools. Techn object does not simply belong to the subject. It consists in penetrating into things, and in the function of things becoming ours. Taking tools in hand, the human being finds himself already in the world of historical life.’ Kitaro Nishida, ‘Logic and Life’ (1936), in Complete Works Vol. 8 (Iwanami Publishing Co.), p. 297, quoted in Ken-ichi Sasaki, Aesthetics on Non-Western Principles, Version 0.5 (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Akademie, 1998), p. 37.

7 ‘Being an operating element in the historical world, we make things with tools. To make things ... means to act bodily. And so it must not be simply subjective but [a] subjective-objective historical fact. That we act presupposes that we desire. From where does a desire come? A desire ... must be aroused from the bosom of our body. So the body must be formed historically too. We should notice that the body is not a simple biological body: the human body must be a historical body.’ Sasaki, p. 38 (Nishida, Collected Works, vol. 8, p. 344-5).

Merleau-Ponty, p. 267.

‘It is by the flesh of the world that in the last analysis one can understand the lived body (*corps propre*) — The flesh of the world is of the Being-seen, i.e. is a Being that is *eminently percipi*, and it is by it that we can understand the *percipere*: this perceived that we call my body applying itself to the rest of the perceived, i.e. treating itself as a perceived by itself and hence as a perceiving, all this is finally possible and means something only because there is Being, not Being in itself, identical to itself, in the night, but the Being that also contains its negation, its *perципi* ....’ *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 250-251.

‘*Flesh of the world*, described (apropos of time, space, movement) as segregation, dimensionality, continuation, latency, encroachment — Then interrogate once again these phenomena-questions: they refer us to the perceiving-perceived *Einfühlung*, for they mean that we are already in the being thus described, that we are of it, that between it and us there is *Einfühlung*. That means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world *reflects* it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world (the felt *senti* at the same time the culmination of subjectivity and the culmination of materiality), they are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping — This also means: my body is not only one perceived/among others, it is the measurant (*mesurant*) of all, *Nullpunkt* of all the dimensions of the world.’ The *touching itself, seeing itself* of the body is itself to be understood in terms of what we said of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the touchable. I.e. it is not an act, it is a being at (*être à*). To touch oneself, to see oneself, accordingly, is not to apprehend oneself as an object, it is to be open to oneself, destined to oneself (narcissism) ....’ *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 248-249.


We can identify a series of body-environment connections, from the body in (the) environment to the bodily environment, the environmental body, body-environment, and, finally, the human
environment (as bodily).

15 Candomblé is strongly African, especially influenced by the Yoruba, but joined with Native American and European elements. In this religion the members seek spirit possession by their gods through chanting and drumming.

16 ‘Hearing does not stop inside your ears; it takes place in the whole body. Even deaf people can dance to music because they feel the vibrations in their bodies’. Madeline Bruser, The Art of Practicing (New York: Bell Tower, 1997), p. 171. See also Chs. 6, 10, 12, and passim.


21 Debussy followed this practice with the titles of each of the preludes.


Chapter X

THE IDEA OF A CULTURAL AESTHETIC

Introduction

In its search for universal knowledge, philosophy has usually been mired in its own presuppositions. Its illuminating principles have often turned out to be illusions, its eternal truths merely local knowledge, its moral imperatives the architecture of custom often disguising the interests of privilege behind the sanctimoniousness of ethical structures. The ancient dialectic between the Stoics and the Sophists continues to replay itself seemingly without end. But surely we must come at some point to a re-structuring of the issues, a re-direction of the philosophic quest. Where might this lie?

Here we may find more answers than we might wish. It is important, however, to withstand the temptation to invent answers ex nihilo. Perhaps, however, we can use as our touchstone what is common and what is diverse in human experience, recognizing all the while that experience itself, phenomenology notwithstanding, is never pure but is historically and culturally conditioned.

When we search for the underlying common ground of experience, the landscape of inquiry changes. Such a groundwork has, like the earth, no fixed and central point, yet it too can provide solid enough footing to build stable structures of human habitation and use. While these structures may not stand forever, they are dependable enough to serve our purposes for the duration. How, then, can we characterize such experience? An answer may lie in the idea of culture.

In this time of increasing international involvement, one cannot but be struck by the fact of sharply different traditions concerning art and its practice. Recognizing that the arts are a salient part of every culture may lead us to wonder about their features and may make us curious about how and why the arts of other cultures differ from what we find more familiar. Perhaps we
hope that the arts will offer us some insight into different cultures and their distinctive worlds.

This, then, is in part an essay in comparative aesthetics. Numerous examples of diverse artistic practices evoke our curiosity. Many of those I shall cite here are environmental and this is deliberate, for environments are a pervasive and powerful material embodiment of cultural practice and sensibility. They provide salient and inescapable evidence of this influence, and they bridge the distance sometimes assumed to lie, quite wrongly, in my opinion, between material culture and its artistic manifestations.

Culture

It is not possible to speak of experience as pure perception untouched by our past encounters, education, and training, and uninfluenced by the ideas and knowledge we have acquired. Social psychologists, cultural geographers, and cultural anthropologists have established the profound degree to which culture influences perception. Yet at the same time, aesthetic perception plays a foundational role in understanding experience. This is because the authenticity of aesthetic experience, through its directness and immediacy, provides a powerful means of reappraising cultural experience by slipping beneath the layers of accrued meanings and cognitive habits. The aesthetic character of experience lies in direct rather than pure perception, in perception apprehended immediately and unreflectively. It is in this sense that we engage aesthetically with art and with environment, both. Perceptual engagement, conditioned by cultural and personal influences, is the catalyzing and unifying force of the aesthetic field.

These influences on aesthetic experience affect the features that we seek to identify in art objects. Questions concerning such matters as aesthetic qualities and expressive properties are not objective issues. Rather they emerge from a tradition that separates and isolates the aesthetic object before proceeding to analyze it, that subjectifies our experiences of that object, and that is then faced with the need to relate and reintegrate what it has thus torn apart. Cultural factors also influence how we enter into association with art objects. This is not just a matter of the attitude
of mind that we bring to them. Our experience is every bit as much an outcome of our somatic involvement when we engage in an aesthetic exchange. Hence a history of taste must involve more than the growth of understanding and responsiveness; it must necessarily include recognition of changes in the ways we live, perceive, and act in our world. The history of style, then, is inseparable from a history of taste, and both style and taste are bound up in the history of culture.

At the same time as different cultural traditions in the arts have become increasingly familiar, ethnic tradition has emerged as a powerful force in cultural identity. The arts are perhaps the most visible manifestation of that identity, and this raises a critical test for any theory of art that has empirical roots. How can we reconcile the differences in aesthetic perception and meaning, for example, in Chinese scroll painting and Western easel painting? In music the contrasts are especially striking, for the forms of that art encompass such disparate traditions as African drumming, Javanese gamelon music, and American jazz. Within ecclesiastical music, the difference between Gregorian chant and the singing of Tibetan monks contrasts with their spiritual resemblance. And it would be hard to find a greater dissimilarity in music than that between the Mozart of late eighteenth century Vienna and the serialism of Schönberg, Berg, and Webern that emerged in the same city in the twentieth.

The influence of culture on art, indeed the formative power of culture, is even more true of environment. The environmental implications of culture are embedded in the very word, for the term ‘culture’ derives from ‘agriculture’. While one must not read whole explanations into etymologies, the connection between agriculture and culture has a curious interest. The kind of agriculture practiced — that is, the methods of cultivation employed and the technology that is utilized — produces qualitatively different environments. That is why, apart from differences in climate and topography, the typical Danish agricultural landscape looks different from the Belgian or the Japanese. Similarly, industrial technology and methods have transformed the British and American agricultural landscapes over the last century and a half, as hedges dividing small fields are uprooted and land consolidated, while small family holdings are increasingly
absorbed into the great tracts of factory farms.

In cultivating the land, then, agriculture domesticates the landscape, that is, makes it a human place. Speaking less literally, farming enables human habitation to establish itself, binding people to place. When hunter-gatherers turned to cultivation, they began to transform the landscape, turning it increasingly into a humanscape. This resulted in different human environments through the influence of many factors, not the least of which was the local culture, which itself evolved out of local environmental and human conditions. The relationship between culture and the agricultural landscape runs deep.

Environment

In the human transformations of the natural landscape, then, lie a history of cultural activity far more pervasive than we may realize. These alterations of the landscape assume patterns that have been guided by habit and local tradition, as well as by broader social and technological trends, for the cultural landscape begins to replace the natural one wherever human society establishes itself. This humanized landscape of culture and history is embodied not only in farmland and countryside but even in places remote and wild. In their climate, flora, and fauna, these bear the imprint of human actions, just as the forms of buildings and roadways do on the other end of the spectrum of human activity. This cultural environment is found, moreover, not only in the physical configuration and inhabitants of our surroundings but in the sights, sounds, smells, and substances that fill our eyes, ears, and lungs and are absorbed deep in our embodied consciousness.

Architecture, for example, cannot be considered merely as the art in building but as the creation of a built environment. And because no aspect of the human habitat is unaffected by our presence, it is no exaggeration to say that architecture and the human environment are, in the final analysis, synonymous and coextensive. A cultural aesthetic is at work here on a collective art. The siting of a building, for example, as much as its architectural design, is a physical
statement of personal and cultural beliefs about the human place in the world. Indeed, buildings stand as the embodiment of such beliefs. They depict the human abode in a variety of contrasting ways, such as aloofness, domination, separation, hostility, enclosure, balance, continuity, integration. Cities, too, embody the distinctive spatial and cultural experiences of different social and cultural groups and traditions. They reflect their economic arrangements, in particular, whether shaped by a politics of expediency, cost, and profit or by collectivity, cooperation, and mutual support.

In this cultural environment, people are embedded in their world. We are implicated in a constant process of action and response from which it is not possible to stand apart. A physical interaction of body and setting, a psychological interconnection of consciousness and culture, a dynamic harmony of sensory awareness all make a person inseparable from his or her environmental situation. Traditional dualisms, such as those separating idea and object, self and others, inner consciousness and external world, all dissolve in the integration of person and place. A new conception of the human being thus emerges. Humans are seen as organic, conscious, social organisms, experiential nodes that are both the product and the generator of environmental forces. These forces are not only physical objects and conditions, in the usual meaning of environment. As we have seen, they also include somatic, psychological, historical, and cultural conditions. Environment becomes the matrix of all such forces. As an integral part of an environmental field, we both shape and are formed by the multitude of forces that produce the experiential qualities of the universe we inhabit. These qualities constitute the perceptual domain in which we engage in aesthetic experience.

We have already spoken, for example, of the many different traditions that are embodied in gardens and landscapes. The contrast between the French formal garden and the English estate garden, between Versailles and Stourhead, is more than the distance of time and place. Symmetrical beds, clipped borders, and arabesque designs offer delight of a strikingly different sort from broad meadows punctuated with groves of trees, ponds, and streams. These traditions vary both ethnically and historically. Most interesting of all, they reflect different sensibilities,
different significances, different influences, and different cultural roles.

Aesthetic theory can respond to these cultural influences in various ways. One is to articulate the perceptual motives and experiences of a particular tradition, to elaborate its distinctive aesthetic and, in its fullest development, to formulate an aesthetics of that culture. Such a cultural aesthetic theory lies in identifying the characteristic sensory, conceptual, and ideational matrix that constitutes the perceptual environment of a culture. It encompasses the typical qualities and configurations of color, sound, texture, light, movement, smell, taste, pattern, space, temporal sensibility, and size in juxtaposition with the human body, and the influence of customary patterns of belief and practice on creating and apprehending these qualities.

Such an aesthetic theory is central to the cultural tradition, and making it explicit helps establish cultural identity. Aesthetic concepts and theory are thus never self-sufficient or self-contained but must be seen within a cultural framework. Cultural knowledge is needed to inform and appreciate the distinctly different sensibility that is embedded in a Japanese sand garden in contrast to a Chinese temple garden, or a French formal garden and an Italian garden; that informs Navajo sand painting, Indian sculpture, the subtly distinctive Buddha statuary of China, Cambodia, and India; that motivates American pop art and Aboriginal x-ray painting.

The human environment, then, is always historico-cultural. Formulating a cultural aesthetic requires us to identify the configuration of perceptual features that is characteristic of a particular human culture at a given time. Certain places exemplify such an aesthetic. In a medieval Gothic cathedral, appreciative perception through distancing does not occur. Here light filtered through stained glass windows, linear masses and volumes, the reverberation of chanting voices and organ, the smell of incense, and the taste of wine and wafer combine to absorb the believer into a multisensory, multimedia environment. Another cultural aesthetic is embedded in the Chinese scholar's garden of the eleventh to nineteenth centuries, which evokes a harmony of spirit and place, of human and nature. A distinctive aesthetic animates the Japanese tea ceremony, which integrates all the senses in a carefully prescribed ritual conducted in a house
and garden dedicated to the purpose.

While the aesthetic centers around perceptual experience, real, virtual, or imaginary, all experience, including aesthetic, is never entirely personal but is always part of a situational process. Further, the black and white outline of every situation is deeply colored by cultural influences. In fact, the very occasions that are seen or experienced as predominately or strongly aesthetic are established by the traditions and practices of individual cultures. At some times and places, aesthetic objects and occasions occur as part of ritual observances. These may be religious ceremonies in the widely different ways they are celebrated. They may be social rituals, from inaugurations and graduations to sporting events. Performances, too, vary widely in form and character among different societies, as do the behaviors considered appropriate to them. Sometimes attending a performance requires contemplative withdrawal from overt participation, while in other circumstances and traditions it encourages active engagement and physical collaboration.

The settings for appreciation vary in a similar way, from concert halls and art galleries to a forest clearing with a fire burning in its center. The conditions for nature appreciation reflect the disparity in appropriate appreciation among different cultures. Think of the Chinese moon-viewing pavilion, scenic drives and outlooks in industrialized countries, sightseeing boats, mountain climbing, sailing, and hiking. Studies in cultural aesthetics are an important way in which aesthetics can join with the social sciences to their mutual benefit.\(^5\) Ch. 5.

**A cultural aesthetic**

An environmental aesthetic thus becomes a cultural aesthetic, an analogue of the cultural landscape of which anthropologists and geographers speak. Environmental aesthetics comprises not only a study of the perceptual features of the environmental medium, features that reciprocate with the people who inhabit it. It must also be complemented by a correlative study of the influences of social institutions, belief systems, and patterns of association and action that
shape the life of the human social animal and give that life meaning and significance.

We can, indeed, study aesthetics from an anthropological standpoint: the anthropology of aesthetics. Here the search includes the kind of factual information that is relevant to any cultural theory. This is gained by studying, not the *art* of different cultures *per se*, but rather those *perceptual experiences* that are valued. The cattle-keeping Nilotes of the Southern Sudan, for example, possess no art objects and no tradition of art as such. Yet in their appreciation of certain perceptual values lies an aesthetic sensibility comparable to the Western one. Similarly, in African and Upper Paleolithic artifacts, concepts such as beauty are irrelevant, and we must develop a different, more inclusive way to understand the aesthetic experiences of diverse cultures.

Once we leave modern Western culture with its own highly focused and restrictive cultural aesthetic, we discover that most historical societies and present-day non-Western ones value experiences that resemble Western experiences of art but range more broadly than those allowed by traditional Western aesthetic theory. In the former, aesthetic experiences pervade the many regions of life, from practical activities devoted to food gathering and craftsmanship, to ceremonial observances and other social occasions. In pursuing a cultural aesthetic, we must abandon the ethnocentric assumptions of modern Western aesthetics that restrict art and the aesthetic to the carefully circumscribed objects and occasions of museums, galleries, and concert halls. Art is more inclusive and aesthetic experience far more pervasive than Western aesthetics has allowed, and their forms and appearances exhibit endless variety. A culturally-engendered sensibility demands a culturally-grounded interpretation.

**Can aesthetics be trans-cultural?**

In pursuing the idea of a cultural aesthetic, we can discern three levels of inquiry. On one, a cultural aesthetic denotes *experience* that is culturally conditioned, a reasonably distinct sensibility that characterizes the way things are perceived aesthetically. Where a Western
observer may see a dry and trackless waste spreading behind Australia’s fertile coast, the
Aboriginal eye discerns traditional travel routes with sacred places inhabited by ancestral spirits.
While the visitor to an unfamiliar city confronts a confusion of streets and throngs of oddly
dressed people speaking an exotic tongue, the resident moves with the ease and confidence of
familiarity. A Hindu worshiper does not find the four arms of Shiva to be bizarre appurtenances
but grasps the distinctive significance that each of them carries. In these instances a cultural
aesthetic is a dimension of a larger and more inclusive experiential complex of perception,
imagination, meaning, and sensitivity, shaped and mediated through beliefs and traditions,
customs and habits.

This chapter has been concerned largely with a second level of cultural aesthetics that
rests on the need to recognize that aesthetic theory should be inclusive and pluralistic. Its
concepts, structures, and interrelationships are dictated by traditions and practices, and they
articulate the perceptual sensibility of particular cultures. Moreover, I do not refer here only to
their arts, for this concept is itself part of a cultural sensibility. Just as the Renaissance ideal of
beauty is located in time and place, so too are such basic aesthetic concepts as the Korean meot
and the Hindu rasa.9

A third level of cultural aesthetics is both intriguing and elusive. It is also easily misused.
This is the idea of cultural aesthetics as a metaesthetic theory that searches for basic structures
common to the aesthetic of different cultures. Can aesthetics be trans-cultural? Can the endless
variety of aesthetic objects and occasions be regarded as variations on a theme? One
consequence of a cultural aesthetic lies in recognizing that an aesthetics of universal principles
may be a blind and empty hope. Formal principles like organic unity and perceptual principles
like aesthetic disinterestedness are based not on an examination of art and its appreciative uses
but on a tradition of philosophy in the West that has been guided by logical, epistemological, and
metaphysical presuppositions.

The search for universality has persisted in the Socratic assumption that universal truths
underlie the disconcerting variety of the empirical world. So to recognize the formative influence
of culture on aesthetic experience is more than to acknowledge the diverse guiding principles that lead to the various patterns of the built landscape or the vastly different traditions in valued perceptual objects. It requires us to carry forward an empirical inquiry into the kinds and varieties of experiences associated in some way with aesthetic activities as these are understood most broadly. Just as we can study comparative religion, we can study comparative aesthetics on the artistic and theoretical levels without prejudging that inquiry by first establishing a definition of art. The phenomena of valued perception exist and it is important to study their various cultural occurrences. The idea of a cultural aesthetic can help guide such an inquiry.

But is some larger order hidden amid this cultural diversity? Can we develop concepts sufficiently inclusive as to accommodate these differences in principles and products and illuminate them within a general theoretical frame? Do the aesthetic of a symphony concert and of a rock concert share anything? Do Italian Renaissance religious painting and late twentieth century political cartoons involve a similar experience or function? Is the variation in cultural landscapes simply one expression of the variety of other formative activities, as humans shape their actions and landscapes in response to the need for survival and the demands and opportunities of their social world? I suspect that among the many artistic forms and occasions we can call aesthetic we may discover certain common features in people’s activities and experiences. Perhaps the formation of dissimilar landscapes reflects similar fundamental human social needs and institutions.\(^\text{10}\) Perhaps a similar structure informs aesthetic occasions in different cultural and historical settings.

A pattern may be discerned amid the rich diversity of artistic activities. This does not take the form of a common principle or articulated value but rather of a structural similarity, a cluster of factors that typically occur in different cultural traditions and practices. Its characteristic features commonly include a perceptual focus: a high level of sensory awareness seems to be central to all aesthetic events. While this usually involves direct sensation, aesthetic perception sometimes occurs in imagination or memory. Attention, moreover, is focused on an object, such as the conventional work of art, but it may also include or center around a performance activity
that realizes in a particular form and on an individual occasion material created more or less abstractly, such as a play or a musical composition. It also includes work that realizes an artistic plan, as in reciting a poem or reading a novel. Further, a creative contribution occurs in making, shaping, or selecting what is considered and what excluded. A correlative factor with these is the activity of appreciation through the active engagement and responsiveness of the participants in the aesthetic situation, including some form of somatic involvement that is part of perceptual awareness. This aesthetic engagement may include a cognitive component in the form of a mythical, religious, or other belief system that informs, interprets, or guides perception.

Such factors as these combine into an aesthetic field, which may be seen as the matrix in which those experiences we call aesthetic take place. Such a basis for generality in cultural aesthetics does not take the form of universal principles but rather of a structural similarity found in different cultural traditions and practices. Its frequency lends support to the hypothesis that a similar structure informs all or nearly all aesthetic events. What is needed, however, is a systematic analysis of those kinds of occasions.\(^1\) Also **Art and Engagement** (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991) and ‘Re-thinking Aesthetics’, in **Re-thinking Aesthetics** (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, forthcoming 2004).

Although these observations are hypothetical, the evidence of cultural aesthetics seems to justify the quest for some kind of generality in aesthetic values. We can see a parallel here with ethical theory in the facts of normative behavior and ethical standards of judgment. In some respects the question in aesthetics is even more troublesome. In ethics, the issue does not lie so much in categorizing intentions and actions as moral as it does in determining how they are to be judged as normative or factual. With such diversity of traditions in artistic and aesthetic practices, even the criteria by which something is to be considered art or aesthetic is at issue. But what both ethics and aesthetics share seems to be the irreconcilability of the facts of relativism and the goal of generality. Yet the way to harmonize these conflicting factors is similar.\(^12\) It lies in recognizing the singularity, the ultimate uniqueness of particular situations, and accepting the
irreducible pluralism of cultural forms. Further, as the bedrock underlying moral diversity includes biological survival and the persistence of social order, aesthetic experience may reveal similar highly general features. Moreover, it acknowledges that whatever common structural pattern we may identify will be necessarily be abstract and non-legislative.

The expectation of some degree of generality in aesthetics is, then, a hypothesis, not a principle or a pronouncement. What we need to do is engage in the fascinating task of descriptive inquiry, exploring an empirical aesthetics as part of the study of cultural forms. The idea of a cultural aesthetic thus leads to an empirical project, one concerned with identifying what the aesthetic consists of in different cultures and with noting the varying sets of factors that make it distinctive in those contexts. A cultural aesthetics also suggests the delicate philosophical task of examining those empirical materials to see if any structural similarities lie embedded in them. Here is a program at once focused and constructive, and it may lead aesthetics to new ground.
NOTES

1 An earlier version of this chapter first appeared in Koht ja Paik / Place and Location, ed. Virve Sarapik, Kadri Tüür, and Mari Laanemets (Estonia: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia, 2002), pp. 19-26 and is reprinted by permission.

2 ‘Culture’ is used throughout this essay in one of the anthropological senses of the term to mean the complex of social organization, institutions, belief systems, behavior patterns, and perceptual sensibility that gives to a social group its distinctive identity at a particular time and place.

3 Several of the following passages are adapted from A. Berleant, Art and Engagement (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), Ch. 4.


5 Hall notes this force clearly: ‘The relation between man and the cultural dimension is one in which both man and his environment participate in molding each other. Man is now in the position of actually creating the total world in which he lives, what the ethologists refer to as his biotope. In creating this world, he is actually determining what kind of an organism he will be’. E.T. Hall, The Hidden Dimension, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) p.4. Tuan recognizes the possibility of changing cultural beliefs by changing environment. See Topophilia, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974) Ch. 7. See also my ‘Aesthetic Paradigms for an Urban Ecology’, in The Aesthetics of Environment (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992),

6 See RES, a journal of anthropology and comparative aesthetics.

7 See Jeremy Coote, ‘Marvels of Everyday Vision: The Anthropology of Aesthetics and the Cattle-Keeping Nilotes’, in Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). ‘The cattle-keeping Nilotes of the Southern Sudan make no art objects and have no traditions of visual art, yet it would be absurd to claim that they have no visual aesthetics. In such a case as this, the analyst is forced to attend to areas of life to which everyday concepts of art do not apply ....’ p. 245 ‘The anthropology of aesthetics as I see it, then, consists in the comparative study of valued perceptual experience in different societies. While our common human physiology no doubt results in our having universal, generalized responses to certain stimuli, perception is an active and cognitive process in which cultural factors play a dominant role. Perceptions are cultural phenomena’. p. 247 ‘The study of a / society's visual aesthetic, for example, should be devoted to the identification of the particular
qualities of form — shape, colour, sheen, pattern, particular instances of the universal appeal of contrast, manifested here in the appreciation of black-and-white and red-and-white beasts in herds of mostly off-white, greyish cattle. Elements which have their origins in this “bovine” aesthetic can be traced through the ways in which Nilotes perceive, appreciate, enjoy, describe, and act in their world’. p. 269.

8 See, for example, Robert Plant Armstrong, Affecting Presence: An Essay in Humanistic Anthropology (Urbana, Ill; University of Illinois Press, 1971). Considering primarily African and Upper Paleolithic artifacts, Armstrong shows that concepts such as beauty, truth, and excellence have little to do with the cultural experience and value of objects. To reveal the aesthetic of a specific culture, Armstrong develops the notion of ‘affecting presence’ to denote the integration of human consciousness with objects. ‘Thus "art" becomes the work of "affecting presence" that embodies the mammalian, human, cultural, and autobiographical features of consciousness. These configurations are “mythic”, and it is because of the value in which myth exists that the presence established is affecting’. See also Robert Plant Armstrong, The Powers of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affecting Presence (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

9 Frédéric Boulesteix, in ‘The aesthetics of the plural Korean essence’, holds that an object possesses *meot* when we perceive the internal movement that animates it, allowing us to join in its essential rhythms. ‘Objects can contain *meot* and we become aware of their presence when our spirit perceives the inner movement which animates it, enabling us to incorporate into ourselves the rhythms of its *essence*.’ (‘Un objet possède du *meot* et nous prenons conscience de cette présence lorsque notre esprit perçoit le mouvement interne qui l’anime, nous permettant alors d’intégrer en nous les rythmes de son *essence*.’) The Great Book of Aesthetics, Proceedings of the XVT International Congress of Aesthetics, Tokyo, Japan, August 2001, ms. p. 14. Also see Ynhui Park, ‘*Meut* as the Most General and Important Concept in Korean Aesthetics’, op. cit. Grazia Marchianò develops the concept of *rasa* as ‘taste raised as a paradigm of aesthetic experience’ in ‘A Quest for Higher Pleasure: The Indian Aesthetic Legacy’, op. cit.


11 I have explored some of these issues in a number of writings. See, for example, The Aesthetic Field: A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience (Springfiled, Ill: C.C. Thomas, 1970)
(Cybereditions:

Chapter XII

SUBSIDIZATION OF ART AS SOCIAL POLICY

Subsidy and Its influences

Subsidy of the arts as a matter of national policy and action arrived belatedly in the United States. Only in recent years, mainly since 1965 when the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was established, has the subsidy of art in this country become an official policy. For nearly the entire two centuries of our existence as a nation, the arts depended on a combination of private philanthropy and individual sacrifice to carry on their various activities. The fact that they have developed and flourished demonstrates that in the arts, as elsewhere, our country has people who possess extraordinary initiative, dedication, talent, and a capacity for self-sacrifice.

Yet this policy of *laissez faire*, like any policy, has encouraged some forms of activity and not others. It has produced a free enterprise economy of the arts, bestowing rewards for successful entrepreneurship, for anticipating and supplying fashionable tastes. In general this has meant support for art that could either magnetize a mass audience, like film or pop music, or that could attract audiences whose smaller numbers were counterbalanced by sufficient personal affluence to support major events of high culture, such as opera, theater, and concerts of classical music and of dance, usually with a major performer as the principal drawing power. Even here, the cost of large organizations was almost never met by box office receipts, and the private patron became the sustaining force in such endeavors. This system bred not only the entrepreneur, the impresario, and the star, but also a supporting cast of ragged artists, who often could sustain themselves only through alternative employment, and who subsidized the arts through their acceptance of a minimal income.

In recent years this has changed somewhat, largely through the growth of collective action and support. Subscription series have created regular audiences and assured the financing of seasonal programming. Guaranteed employment for full seasons and professional
associations that have taken the economic leadership in bargaining have made the condition of performing artists somewhat more stable. Efforts are being made to extend the royalty system to creative artists not previously covered by it, such as painters and sculptors. And with federal subsidies, most notably through the NEA and its correlative state councils, along with increased private foundation and corporate support, the condition of artists and the arts has begun to change in significant ways. Indeed, there appears to be a proliferation of regional art activities in the form of groups, institutions, workshops, lectures, conferences, festivals, and art centers. We would appear to stand at the threshold of a period of great cultural awakening.

There is no doubt that such developments signify a major shift in the attitude toward the arts of the general public and major institutions in this country. We seem finally to have joined those nations who regard their cultural life as a major resource that warrants regular, sustaining support. One can only praise the change in national priorities that recognizes ‘that a high civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone but must give full value and support to the other great branches of man’s scholarly and cultural activity’, as the legislation that established the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities states. It would be useful, however, to view this emerging concern for the arts with a fresh and wider vision so that we may better assess its significance and assist its efforts.

**Art as process rather than object**

Support for the arts seems clearly directed toward the broad range of objects and events we commonly agree to call art — opera, dance, theater, literature, painting, music, sculpture, and architecture, among others. At times we broaden our view to include those crafts and skills that clearly embody similar principles and values — ceramics, glass blowing, cabinetry, leatherwork, furniture design, gardening, and more recently such things as industrial design. Wide though such a range of arts may be, a view of social support that is directed exclusively toward them suffers from a major limitation. Its purpose is to encourage the production and
preservation of objects and, in the performing arts, the presentation of events. To restrict our focus to such easily identifiable goals would seem to be both necessary and obvious. Is not this what art is, and can we not mark the great ages of cultural bloom by the plays of Sophocles and Shakespeare, the sculpture of Phidias and Michelangelo, the paintings of Leonardo and Rembrandt, the music of Bach and Beethoven?

Yet the creators of these works did not appear spontaneously and unpredictably. Such remarkable figures emerged as part of an organic rather than a magical or chance process. Art grows and ripens as a culture matures. Not that it comes as the last stage of cultural development, for in some form or other the arts pervade every human society and at every stage. Yet the roots of the most lofty achievements in art penetrate deep into the soil of their entire civilization and are nourished by its cultural fertility and its social climate. An artistic culture does not consist in a collection of objects: it is rather the very atmosphere of thought, interest, and activity from which those objects emerge. To put it more directly, the art works we value are the more noticeable and identifiable features of a broad and inclusive cultural process. We should direct our efforts, therefore, to enriching such a process and not just to magnifying the signs of its success.

The original Greek usage of our central terms suggests this interpretation. Art originally referred to the skill in making or doing things, and aesthetic concerned our perception of interesting objects by both feeling and the senses. Such breadth of significance suggests an inclusiveness that broadens art to embrace all skillful activity and its appreciative aspect to involve a full range of response. It is only in the more recent history of the arts that invidious distinctions have been drawn between fine and practical art, between creating and responding to art, between appreciating and participating in art, between perceptual delight and practical function. Such divisions are unfortunate, for they isolate phases of a cultural process that merge in practice as inseparable parts of the life of a total culture, and they lead to the erection of barriers between these functionally continuous activities. This development of specialized artistic functions parallels a similar compartmentalization of other activities in complex modern
societies. While such separations seem to render easier the technical mastery that industrial technology requires, they lead to the fragmentation of the lives of individuals and of their collective culture.

The place of the arts in society

For all the intensity of achievement that the specialization of work produces, it seems to promote a poverty of imagination at the same time as it increases the level of subsistence. To achieve a humanized culture in an industrial civilization requires us act deliberately to foster interchange and connectedness among the divided domains of social life so that its qualities and meanings attain greater integration. The arts, in fact, have never left craft technology far behind, and even when they employ sophisticated industrial skills, materials, and equipment, they do so mostly on a small scale. In this case, such a separation of functions leads to a narrowing of the range of aesthetic involvement and response. The general problem, then, is to redirect modern social life in order to develop a breadth of deliberate awareness, both cognitive and perceptual, while still retaining the concentration of activity that the attainment of expertness requires. Here the arts not only can benefit from such integration in their own right; they can serve as a model for the general culture, as well.

The argument might be offered that whatever was the original meaning of art and the aesthetic, this is no reason to observe it today, and to insist otherwise would be to entangle oneself in a genetic fallacy. Surely meanings evolve to respond to altered conditions and needs, and we should be prepared to adapt to them. In this case, an industrial society can only survive when its complex and arcane workings are guided by the highly trained professional. Indeed, it is an identifying trait of advanced industrial civilization that the professional displaces the worker in proportionate numbers as well as in importance. In similar fashion, the arts have become more complex, being created by exotic techniques under the guidance of a seemingly
incomprehensible imagination. Such art requires a specialization of appreciation to match that of creation, and the recent history of the arts has produced a corresponding evolution of their audience.

It is essential to realize, however, that the arts have always been integrated into their larger culture. They have responded to shifts in taste and fashion and to changes in the social uses to which they have been put, as much as they have promoted those same changes. This was equally the case in medieval Christendom, Renaissance Italy, Elizabethan England, seventeenth century Holland, and Enlightenment France, as it was in Classical Greece. Indeed, one could easily regard the progressive isolation of the arts in the past two centuries as an aberration in their social history. Yet it may be more accurate to see this phase of aesthetic alienation as accomplishing two purposes. It provided the ground for identifying and cultivating an aesthetic sensibility as such. At the same time it offered an independent place from which to launch an artistic critique of the threats to humanistic values contained in social changes during the modern age.

This is not the place to develop a case for the continuity and dependence of the arts on the total culture, although their entire history stands behind it. What is essential at our present stage of social development is to recognize and rearticulate this integration as a current cultural necessity. There is much to be gained by the diffusion and assimilation of the aesthetic in the wider culture, not just in the form of heightened sensibility and fuller social consciousness, but in the possibilities it offers for the rediscovery of the individual human locus of perceptual meaning in mass society and culture. Furthermore, an enlightened policy of subsidization of the arts should have such a scope constantly in view and should regard the attainment of this goal as its principal mission.

Such a general claim as I have been making needs specification in order that we may see the concrete significance of a widened and integrated cultural aesthetic. Let us review briefly some of the history and highlights of subsidization in the United States. Then we shall consider a number of areas in which a broadened and enlightened policy of subsidization could lead to
differences in practice.

**Subsidization in the recent past**

In endorsing the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, President Lyndon Johnson proclaimed that by establishing such a foundation ‘we follow the example of many other nations where government sympathy and support have helped to shape great and influential artistic traditions’. Such recognition was the result of a long and slow process of countering long-standing disregard and opposition to the practice of subsidization.

The standard form that arguments for art subsidy take consists in recounting the difficult straits in which major institutions of high art find themselves. Figures are cited that offer convincing evidence of the economic crisis that besets symphony orchestras, opera companies, and museums. Careful argument and documentation have generated a swell of public support for these institutions, and since the mid-1960s there has been a growing amount of subsidy provided by a wide range of public and private sources. We have seen federal, state, and local governments recognize that the arts are not just a source of private delectation but represent major social values and make a social contribution that needs to be encouraged and made secure from the constant threat of extinction. We have seen private foundations assume a catalytic role in artistic as well as other areas, giving financial encouragement to new ventures during their early period of organization and consolidation. The economic position of our major artistic institutions now seems relatively assured.

This is not a sanguine situation, however, and on several counts. First, the dollar amount of support seems impressive until we see it in relation to costs and expenditures. One may regard it as a notable achievement when the major source of funding for the arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, received increased its appropriation from about $3,000,000 when it began in 1966 to over $115,000,000 in 2003. At the same time, although the 43.75% cut in the NEA budget in 1992 was partly taken up by increased private sector support, present funding
has not reached its 1992 level in dollar amount and would need to be doubled to reach its 1992 peak in real terms. Furthermore, “in terms of absolute dollars or percentage of spending relative to gross domestic product or other measures, direct government arts spending remains low.” At the same time, the recognition is growing that the arts can be a significant economic stimulus to communities, and both state and local arts agencies and private philanthropic source have increased their support. Yet non-profit arts organizations receive less than half their income from governmental and philanthropic sources combined, and many arts organizations are in a permanent state of fiscal crisis.

A good deal of information is available on the kinds of aid given the arts in the United States, and well-supported recommendations have been made for improving the situation. Novel proposals for additional governmental funding sources are being offered, as well as conceptual restructuring, such as lowering the distinction between non-profit and for-profit arts sectors and encouraging cross-sector arts partnerships.

But there is more to this problematic situation than just limited support. The arts must continually face other restrictions. For example, there is a deeper problem in the narrowness of the range of subsidization. Awards tend to go only to established organizations and individuals, and considerations of safety and accountability take precedence over imagination and innovation. A review of the annual reports of the various programs of the NEA shows that even those grants that reach individual artists have been paltry in sum, with somewhat larger grants going to the most highly recognized artists. In both cases the amounts are of a size that would make little financial difference in supporting artists at the stage in their careers when they are safe enough investments to justify receiving them. Moreover, programs and grants are notoriously vulnerable to political pressures, and one consequence of this is the virtual elimination of direct grants to individuals, especially visual artists. The appointment of new chairmen of the NEA and NEH has regularly become an occasion for considerable public discussion of the policy guiding the disbursement of federal funds in these areas. The scope of federal subsidies is challenged, with some critics deploring support for ‘educationalists, audiences and amateurs as well’ as
professional artists and scholars, and questioning the policy that encourages the broad
distribution of funds over many levels of institutions involved in the arts and over a wide range
of locations beyond the few great urban centers. Occasionally iconoclastic art works and
exhibitions have generated public controversy, and decisions on such awards have been
challenged by politicians and other self-proclaimed guardians of public morality, who may be
assuaging their own outraged sensibilities, oblivious of the social role of the arts in enlarging
perceptual consciousness.

**Enlightened subsidization**

As the National Endowment for the Arts evolved, it developed programs that encourage
widespread distribution of subsidies, both geographically and culturally. Yet the choice does not
lie between elitism and populism, which becomes a political red herring that some use to
undermine support for the arts. Such an alternative embodies that unhappy disjunction between
higher and lower art, between high and popular culture, a distinction that has limited historical
credibility. The answer is clearly not a question of deciding which beggar should be given a crust
but rather in realizing that all contributions to the general enhancement of cultural values merit
support and that backing them should be generous and substantial. We must face in specific
terms the possibility that an attack on the roots of poverty is as much a war on cultural poverty as
the reduction of material want. An aesthetic penuriousness atrophies both sensibility and
imagination, as much as economic want debilitates health, and both persist in perpetuating
themselves. To its credit, the NEA has recognized this and has developed programs for
disbursing its already limited funds still more thinly over a wide range of folk, popular, and
classical arts.

Related to this is the unfortunate tendency toward centralization in art as much as in
industry. Indeed, even as industry has begun to decentralize itself, art in this country continues to
gravitate toward a few major centers and primarily toward New York City. Moreover, even there the arts tend to be focused in a relatively few leading museums and cultural institutions. An interesting counter movement is developing, however, in the direction of a healthy regionalism. Cities scattered throughout the country have begun to become regional hubs for artistic activities — Atlanta in the southeast, Seattle in the northwest, San Diego in the southwest, and Minneapolis in the north central, to name some of the more outstanding. Moreover, universities have assumed the role once held by the princely courts of the Renaissance in becoming the locus and patron of the arts. They have become seats of culture and centers of artists, and have encouraged an important regionalism independent of the largest population and commercial concentrations.

This is a step toward the more equitable access of our cultural resources to everyone. Here we might emulate Europe, where even small cities often have their opera house, their theater, their symphony orchestra, and their art museum. In an effort at imitation, State Arts Councils have encouraged tours by opera, ballet, orchestra, and theater groups, and have supported local programmes. Yet we have only begun to distribute access to our cultural hoards. A single shift in practice that would have powerful consequences, to mention but one area, would follow from a basic change in museum philosophy. Instead of regarding museums as treasure houses in which four-fifths of their great collections are buried in storage vaults, these hidden mines of cultural riches, representing social wealth amassed through centuries of civilization, could be loaned to local museums and exhibition halls, and placed in traveling exhibits sent throughout the villages, towns, and small cities of the country.

Artistic careers, likewise, need not be confined to the tiny number of people who, by a lucky combination of outstanding talent, financial resources, personality traits, and the smiles of fickle fortune, are able to establish themselves successfully. There is much wasted talent that could contribute in a major way to extending cultural exposure and aesthetic experience by working at the level of the local community. This is now being done to some degree through various kinds of visiting artist programs and artists’ residencies.
The mass audience, which alone can support the super star, may have its place, although this can be challenged on grounds of aesthetic dilution and ineffectiveness. Cavernous halls and surging crowds are not the setting in which to experience the intimacy of art. There is rather a great need to engage art on a personal level. As books have replaced the public lecture, recordings and television may be capable of supplanting performances for the mass audience, overcoming the distance of time and place to create a certain sense of personal contact. Living events, on the other hand, should be on a scale proportionate to human persons, and smaller museums and auditoriums offer the proper balance.

What is needed is to humanize the aesthetic situation. A certain deprofessionalization would also help, for at times the line between the professional and the amateur is drawn in economic terms and not in artistic ones. A local level of art activity can rest on talent and availability instead of on mass advertising and the finances and organization to secure it. Because the performance and the appreciation of the arts are inseparable, a far wider participation in both phases will breed a more knowledgeable and responsive public and artistic results of unexpected quality.

It may be in education that the richest opportunity exists for the aesthetic enlightenment of American society. It is in the formative years that perceptual and motor skills are most malleable, and indeed, as psychological research has suggested in certain cases, the very capacity to assimilate such experiences must be exercised at critical points in a child's development or it will never develop. What is needed is not simply exposure to works of art and educational programs to teach about them. More basic yet is the awakening of perceptual capacities, which the arts have a singular ability to help us discover and extend. It is essential to realize that this is not a matter of cultural polish. It is a question of full human sensibility — perceptual awareness, sensitivity to people, an understanding of personal meanings, and the capacity for feeling. To attain this is not just a matter of introducing courses in the arts into the curriculum. It is one of assimilating the arts into the very fabric of the subjects presently taught, for by increasing their perceptual significance we enhance their meaning and improve our understanding.
Communication skills, for example, involve not only grammar and speech but the language of gesture and image, which dance, theater, photography, and film exploit most effectively. Social studies deal not only with matters of historical fact, political processes, and economic practices. They also concern human freedom, fate, and fulfillment, and these are no more eloquently exhibited than in literature, theater, painting, and poetry. Science and mathematics encompass more than fact and formula. They exhibit art in their theory construction and involve orders of space, time, mass, structure, and volume, whose perceptual dimensions are the frame and forms of the human environment, and these are revealed in our engagement with sculpture and architecture. It is encouraging to see strong support developing for aesthetic education and numerous recommendations for accomplishing this coming from various panels and commissions.  

But the arts must not be seen only as an addendum to the curriculum. They represent, in their own right, the heart of human experience. No, they do more than represent it: they embody it. By teaching children to enter its world, the arts enter theirs and change it. Instead of an education that inducts children into a world of limitations, experience with the arts can promote heightened consciousness of their surroundings and creative outlets for their energies. The arts in education are not a frill but perhaps the most powerful means of leading children into the world of humane experience.

Finally, a broad and inclusive conception of art and its social role can promote the distinctive contribution the arts can make to the physical and social shape of our environment. The arts develop in their practitioners highly sensitized perceptual abilities and a sharpened awareness of the sensory domain. Such skills lead to a distinct perspective on experience and make artists valuable contributors to the disciplines that collaborate in environmental planning. Yet artists are rarely if ever involved in that process. An enlightened understanding of the social role of the arts would encourage the regular participation of aesthetic consultants in city and regional planning and in environmental studies. Construction and zoning regulations become policies that guide building decisions and practices. Yet they do more than set physical
specifications. They are policies that shape our surroundings and create the conditions for human life and consciousness. Choices made in the planning process determine the kind of human world we inhabit.

A conception of art as a social activity that helps in generating a communal setting acknowledges that aesthetic experience makes a social contribution, a contribution toward the experience of full community. A perspective on art and the aesthetic that welcomes the uniqueness of what they offer to education, planning, and other social activities recognizes the formative influence of art on the pervasive qualities of a culture. Such a perspective encourages the process of integrating art into the life of a society.

A social goal emerges from such a view: the development and assimilation of an artistic-aesthetic component into the general culture of our society. As a social interest, this is an objective that requires social investment and support. To urge such backing, however, is not to placate a special interest group, for the arts are not a special interest but a general, social one. Thus in supporting art we are not subsidizing art alone but the entire society, and through the arts we are assisting in the evolution of a distinctive American culture. In fact, ‘a period of efflorescence in the arts is apt to lead a cultural advance: it formulates a new way of feeling, and that is the beginning of a cultural age’.

This is no vacuous homily. Becoming conscious of the pervasiveness of the aesthetic in culture leads us to recognize that social support through an enlightened and imaginative program of subsidies is a necessary means of promoting cultural evolution. What is essential is that we broaden our economic parameters to incorporate aesthetic and more generally cultural values, and that we develop a new accounting system in the service of a ‘total economics’. The British artist John Latham proposes substituting units of attention for monetary units, and the general level of awareness within a community and the increase of consciousness through time for the gross national product. Latham relates each unit of attraction to the number of people who are affected by an idea, the length of time it is influential, and the degree of awareness that it induces measured
by a scale that moves from unconsciousness to most heightened awareness.¹⁶

What is needed is a major recognition of the central importance of aesthetic awareness throughout American society and a full social commitment to the support of the arts, understood broadly and inclusively. To accomplish this is an essential goal if we are to follow Burke and join those communities that are partnerships in all art, all beauty, all culture, all the virtues that ennable life.
NOTES

1This chapter appeared in *Journal of Behavioral Economics*, VIII, 1 (Summer, 1979), 23-37, and was reprinted in the *Journal of Cultural Economics*, Dec. 1980. It has been revised and up-dated, and is reprinted here with permission. Government support for the arts has gone through many phases in the twenty-five years since this essay first appeared, and the chapter does not attempt to review them, although the discussion of appropriations and policy for the National Endowment for the Arts has been brought up-to-date. Official policy has also tended to move in the direction proposed here, although not always for enlightened reasons, of encouraging the process of the arts and their contribution to the larger culture.

2 *The Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990* extends to visual artists the federal moral rights of attribution and integrity and proposes (but does not establish) that visual artists receive a proportion of any increased value in a work upon its resale.


5 Brustein, Robert, ‘Whither the National Arts and Humanities Endowments?’ *The New York Times*, December 18, 1977, p. 35D.


7 Seaman, op. cit., p. 11.

8 In 1997, for example, governmental sources accounted for only 6% of the income of performing arts organizations and non-governmental philanthropic organizations provided 36%, leaving 58% to be covered by earned income. The picture for museums was markedly different, for government support accounted for 30% of their support and philanthropy for 23%. See Seamon, op. cit., p. 18.

9 Seaman, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

10 Seaman, op. cit., pp. 33 ff. See also Cobb, Nina. “Private Sector Giving to the Arts and Humanities: An Update,” Background paper prepared for the Center for Arts and

11 “Congress has prohibited the Arts Endowment from making direct grants to individuals except for Literature Fellowships, American Jazz Masters Fellowships, and National Heritage Fellowships in the Folk & Traditional Arts.” NEA website: www.nea.gov.


14 An early effort in this direction was the Panel on the Arts, Education, and Americans, which published a comprehensive and resourceful study. See Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1966, Bk. 1, pp. 273-274. It has been followed by other reports and journals, as aesthetic education has become a vital area of research.


Chapter XIII

MORALITY AND THE ARTIST: TOWARD AN ETHICS OF ART

The questions at issue

For all that is distinctive about the world of art, there is little doubt that a web of threads binds it to the rest of the social fabric. Certainly, views of the unique and separate character of art that originated in the late eighteenth century had a great deal to do with the development of a distinctive identity for the artist and the important and unique place of that profession in the human community. In accomplishing this, however, the past two centuries have tended to obscure the social character of artistic activity, and it is only in recent decades, particularly since the early sixties, that the Western world has begun to reaffirm these ties. Indeed, many artists have themselves insisted on this, both in their art and in their lives. Realism in the novel and the film, functionalism in architecture and design, the use of objets trouvés, Happenings, and pop art are some of the more obvious examples that come to mind.

While ethical queries are being raised with greater frequency to the extent that they become at times a ruling concern for certain artists who find themselves embroiled in controversies involving foreign policy, economic affairs, and social justice, they are not posed now for the first time. Indeed, the glorious autonomy of art since the eighteenth century is rather an aberration in its history, for moral questions have recurring throughout most of its long past and have often dominated the free play of the creative impulse. It is, in fact, probably this very constraint that led to the exaggerated claims for the complete
independence of artistic activity. Yet it may be that a judicious balancing of the factors of artistic independence and social influence will allow us to achieve a more realistic assessment of what each of these factors recognizes about the activity of art, and can suggest the direction for achieving a productive reconciliation.

Concern over the social effects of art has a long history. The most famous example of this continues to be Plato, who recognized the powerful influence the arts have on the formation of character, and whose expulsion from the Republic of the poet who could make anything attractive set the pattern for censorship that has continued to the present day. He was followed by Aristotle, who believed that the statesman could use the pleasurable effects of music and dancing, poetry, and painting to mold character, leading to the practice of the Middle Ages, in which aesthetics was crushed out by ‘the Christian moral resistance’. The Renaissance was more conciliatory, with Alberti and Leonardo proposing that the moral and the aesthetic be joined in the painter. For them ‘the painter must be a kind of priest, and piety and virtue were regularly thought of as a part of the necessary equipment of the would-be painter’. Later, in the eighteenth century, Reynolds regarded right moral purpose as one of the maxims of the artist. More recently, the moral significance of artists has gained greater recognition and cases could easily multiply into a full-length study.

Yet while it is clear that this is no new concern, it is also true that the condition of the contemporary artist raises these questions in a wider and more acute fashion than in the past. The proliferation of movements and styles in the arts has coincided with the dissolution of widely supported social norms. And the dominance of commercial culture and political ideologies in developing and advanced societies has placed the artist in a milieu in which the range of possibilities for the social appropriation of art has charged an already ambiguous domain with new complexities. Thus moral demands are placed on the artist of a scope, intricacy, and
difficulty not found before, and there are no longer special categories or convenient divisions to separate and insulate the realm of the artist and thus circumscribe the range of discussion.

It is important to recognize that the ethical discussion of art actually circles around two distinct but related axes. One is the moral status of the art object, an object challenged for its influence on those who are exposed to it and consequently subjected to the restrictive hand of the censor. The other is the moral stature of the artist, pursued, tempted, co-opted, perhaps exploited by a social order that encompasses many interests but seldom those that are the artist’s own.

The first of these focal points involves the moral judgment of the object of art, and raises its attending questions, empirical and philosophical: What effects does art have on its viewers, and how tightly can the causal connection be drawn? What would be the results of a policy of censorship on the creative capabilities of the artist and on the vitality of artistic culture? What would be the consequences of social controls over artistic activity to a society as a whole and to the life of its larger culture? What are the social goals of artistic activity and what special contribution can it make? Where do the principal values of art reside? These are large and important issues, and have been the central subject of scholarly and scientific concern over moral issues, with differing and inconclusive results.

Less pondered but no less puzzling, however, are those issues that center on artists themselves. Do the moral constraints that prevail as part of the social code apply equally to them, or is their activity so distinctive that it gives them a privileged place, uniquely immune to the rules that guide other actors in the social drama? How are artists bound morally to those with whom they come into contact, both through their profession and apart from it? Do artists’ influence on their society justify social concern and control over their activities? Do artists’ contribution to the life of the community justify their being subsidized or supported by society and, if it does, what droits du seigneur does society acquire as patron? These are general questions, to be sure, but each raises specific kinds of cases with which an artist cannot avoid being confronted and that concern the moral stature of the person rather than the art. This chapter will inquire into such matters as these.
Let me proceed by a division of the question, as it were, into three distinguishable types of moral demand that can be placed on the artist: first, those that apply to everyone as a moral being and therefore apply equally to the artist; second, those that apply particularly but not exclusively to the artist as a social participant by virtue of the distinctiveness of that profession and its influence; and third, those that apply uniquely to the artist since they derive from the peculiar nature of the artist’s task and powers. While these may be joined with one another in practice, they actually involve different moral conditions, and it will illuminate the more general issue to consider them separately.

The obligations of artists as persons

Many of the moral problems of artists are not problems of artistic morality at all. On examination they instead turn out to be versions of standard moral situations in which the instantiation is simply what follows from the particular but not peculiar circumstances of the artist's profession. Whatever else he or she may be, the artist is a person who shares with all other people a common humanity. Thus those demands that are held to apply to everyone as a moral being apply equally to the artist. Questions that are raised about the honorableness of one’s motives or the undue influence of ego or ambition are not peculiar to the artist at all but may be asked of every human being who performs actions that affect others. Similarly, to judge the honesty of the artist is to consider that person’s candor and openness in treating others without dissembling or deceit, and to ask about his or her trustworthiness is to wonder whether the artist will be responsible and keep promises. There is nothing to differentiate the morality of such conduct in the artist from that of anyone else.

The way in which a painter treats a model, then, is no different in kind from how the teacher handles a student, the researcher an assistant, the doctor a patient, the employer a worker, the politician a constituent, the businessman a customer. The durability or reliability of a painting or a kinetic sculpture reflects the integrity of the artist no less than does the dependability of any
other mercantile object the integrity of its producer. Nor is the pricing of an artist's work any more immune to judgments of avarice than that of any other marketable object, and claims that special circumstances justify excessive prices are no more exceptional than any other special interest. It holds equally true that the demand by visual artists for a continuing monetary claim in the re-sale of their work should be governed by the same legal principles that justify royalties on the sales of a novel or the performances of a piece of music. And the bribing of a critic is no different from the bribing of a politician or a judge. By becoming an artist one does not cease being a person.

In all these circumstances and relationships there is a pattern of obligation and expectation, of reciprocal services and rights that the conventions of the situation lead everyone to expect. Considerations of honesty, fairness, trustworthiness, and sincerity apply to all, *mutatis mutandis*, in essentially the same way. Nor is the artist any less responsible for his or her actions than the motorist, the lawyer, or the bricklayer. To the extent that there is a reasonable expectation of foresight, of competence, of skilled judgment, and of control, the burden of consequence is the *prima facie* responsibility of the performer of the act.

In such cases, then, the artist can claim no privileged moral standing, and whatever ambiguities or theoretical disagreements there may be in the ethical appraisal of the situation, the same considerations hold equally for all. Thus the composer who agrees to give a lecture following a performance of his work, but who repeats the performance in lieu of the lecture, is little different from the merchant who agrees to deliver a bed and a sofa but sends two sofas. Nor is the writer who accepts an advance but fails to produce the work agreed upon very different from the merchant who requests a deposit but never delivers the goods agreed on. Similarly the artist who makes an extra print beyond the number in a series to satisfy a dealer's (or creditor's) demand, or the painter who copies her own painting to satisfy an insistent request without the knowledge or consent of the owner of the original are engaged in dupery no different from the salesman who misrepresents the product he is selling. The morality of an artist is before all else the morality of a person.

Then there are cases involving various kinds of misrepresentation such as the use of false
or misleading advertising provided or sanctioned by the artist. One form of this is in recordings that refashion a performance by the use of splices and variable speed devices to produce a result so different in tempo and execution from the playing from which the recording was derived as to make it an original work in its own right. To advertise it as a performance, then, is to misrepresent the musician's achievement. In such cases, the principal ‘performer’ may indeed be the chief recording engineer.⁷

A related situation involves false identity, in which a work written by one person appears under the name of another. The case of forgery in painting is similar, for forgeries falsely represent a work's origin, and insofar as the artist is the source of the misrepresentation, he or she occupies a moral status no different from that which applies to any other instance of outright deceit.⁸ In all these instances the involvement of an artist is only incidental to the moral situation and does not alter its character. As a basically moral being, the artist stands with the rest of humanity.

The obligations of artists as artists

There is, however, another sort of moral demand that carries more interest for us here. The artist does perform a distinctive social role, possesses special powers, and produces work that, by virtue of its special character, stands apart from the contributions of others. To the extent that there are significant differences, we may ask, Doesn’t the artist possess a special moral status? Thus one may claim that certain moral demands apply particularly (but perhaps not exclusively) to the artist, as they would to any person acting under the special conditions that emerge from the distinctive features of that profession, and that give him or her a certain significant influence and control over the actions of others through active participation in the life of the culture.

This is an appealing situation for the proponents of artistic license, for they rightly recognize the distinctive contribution that art makes in the social order, and reason that the fulfillment of this possibility requires the unconstrained freedom of the artist to follow in the direction that person’s talents may lead.⁹ Yet there is a certain blithe faith in this doctrine of
artistic laissez faire, for it assumes the automatic benefit of the artistic enterprise to the social welfare and, as with other such articles of faith, it is not always supported by the facts. Unlike the products of commerce, whose specific purposes and uses may also have wider social effects and whose broader effects must qualify their more immediate benefits, the artists’ products do not only have general social effects; in some cases they consist wholly of those effects. The position of the artist in this respect resembles that of the teacher, the psychiatrist, and the physicist, whose work may not shape specific results but yet creates whole modes of awareness and entire regions of possible action.

To the extent that there are no specific practical tasks that an art object may be designed to fulfill, its effects are precisely those diffuse and indeterminate consequences that we indiscriminately call aesthetic experience, enjoyment, or pleasure. Yet though they may be undifferentiated, they are not inessential. For the artist cannot be said to produce anything but that it must have such effects simply to function as art. The painting never seen or the novel never read are empty of all aesthetic import except potentially, in that they may at some future time be seen or read, that is, activated and thus made to work as art. Yet this, after all, may not be so unlike the manufacturer who depends upon the demands of a specific market to make business possible. Not only are that person’s products bought in order to fill some need or satisfy a desire; they may be used by their purchasers for some further purpose. They may, in fact, be part of a sequence of means rather than ends in themselves, and their indirect consequences cannot be kept apart from their proximal effects. At times legislators and the law recognize this, from banning phosphate detergents to awarding damages for product-related injuries. Moreover, both enterprises may join one another, for industry is a principal patron of art today, and it can also make effective use of the artist's skills in persuading the public of the attractiveness, the efficacy, or the life-enhancing value of its wares. And artists, by entering the employ of industry, relinquish any claim to autonomy and become subject to whatever moral constraints may apply to the enterprise for which they now work. Moreover, by generating broad social effects, both art and industry operate within the moral realm and therefore must assume the responsibility that pertains to any moral agent.
This is a subtle and difficult region in which to wander, for the socializing, humanizing force of art is one of its major capacities, enfolding us not only to consider how it can most effectively be encouraged to develop, but at the same time requiring us to retain a concern for those incalculable effects that it has such a delicate power to produce. It is the recognition of this diffuse but nonetheless intensely moral situation that leads to confused awareness of moral significance and to acts that express that recognition, without any sure guidance by principle or doctrine. What do we say of an artist like Toulouse-Lautrec, whose paintings of prostitutes and brothels led his mother to disapprove on moral grounds, or of a more recent painter who produces disposable art that has moral implications both in itself as a model and perhaps as a symbolic criticism of such wastefulness at a time of diminishing world resources? What do we say of pop art that, like so much art of social criticism in the past, such as Hogarth's paintings and Daumier's satirical sculptures and paintings, attempts to engage our sensibilities and shape our consciousness of the slick, the false, the vulgar, the mundane dehumanization that pervades our plastic culture? And what do we say of the co-optation of artists by politics, as when artists in the employ of a totalitarian regime bend their services in glorifying war and violence, or in endorsing or exalting a policy of racism, as occurred with the pianist Walter Gieseking, the poet Ezra Pound, the novelist Knut Hamsun, and in the brilliantly fashioned propaganda films of Leni Riefenstahl? Again, there are more recent instances of artists troubled over participating in a festival or embarking on a government sponsored tour and sharing with others living under repressive regimes the common perceptions and elevating experiences that art has the unique capacity to create. To do so would lend at least implicit personal support and explicit artistic enhancement to a regime that systematically and as a matter of official policy suppresses human freedoms. Some artists choose to boycott such activities; others claim that the range of artistic responsibility lies only within the limits of artistic production, and within whose bounds alone their integrity is at stake. Here, too, belong the issues raised by the subtle differences between eroticism, pornography, and sexual exploitation.

None of these cases can easily be judged and quickly written off, for they all raise questions about the possible abuse of powers that are peculiar to the artist. Yet while these are
distinctive circumstances, they do not create unique situations. Each profession has its own spheres, to be sure, but each must respond to the same moral claims that are binding on every influential actor and action. To propose here what these are would be both presumptuous and unnecessary: this is the larger task of an ethical theory. It is sufficient only to recognize the continuity of the domain of the artist with that of every other specialized cultural activity, and to see it joined with all in a common moral realm. As an artist one does not relinquish one’s sociality; indeed, as an artist one affirms it the more.

The social contribution of artists

Yet while artists’ responsibilities to society are in some respects common to those of every person and in other respects peculiar to their art, these modes of social responsibility do not complete the range of moral possibilities. There is, to be sure, a certain distinctiveness to the profession of artist, and certain capacities that follow from this. A sensitive portrayal of the realm of the artist's activities reveals more, however, than a particular ability to influence; it discloses a task and powers that are exclusively the artist’s and that create moral demands that apply solely to him or her. Thus not only do artists retain their social responsibility; they acquire an additional one as well, a responsibility to their art. Indeed, artists themselves often astonish us by recognizing and following that unique obligation, at times in a dramatic fashion.

There are, I believe, two forms this obligation takes: one that comes from the artist’s singular ability to reveal and shape reality, and another that derives from the integrity of artists and of their art. The first implies a metaphysics of art and the second an ethics of art, the development of which is clearly beyond the scope of a prolegomenon such as this. My purpose here, however, is not so much proof as it is proposal, and it is from the artist as well as the philosopher that it comes.

Unlike Plato, for whom painting and poetry are suspect because they are thrice removed from what is real and hence can provide nothing but a semblance of their subjects, artists by word and act may make an opposing claim. What they are doing is intensely serious, offering us
not only opportunities for heightened sensibility, expression, communication, and imaginative representation, but unique occasions for exposure, discovery, and an intensified awareness of the human world. ‘Art is then the becoming and happening of truth,’ wrote Heidegger, and ‘Truth, as the lighting and unconcealing of what is, happens inasmuch as it is composed or invented’. 12

What art does, then, is to reveal, to make more coherent or, even perhaps, to bring into being what is confused, obscure, but often tentatively groped toward in other, more ordinary, conditions. 13 The novelist engages us in the trials and pains of human relationships as they constantly strive toward resolution and equilibrium and just as regularly are deflected by movement, growth, and the thirst for the new. The poet shapes imagination through metaphor and its rich possibilities of universal relationships. The painter opens our perception of people and places or of purely sensory and formal qualities so that we may enter into communion with them. The film maker rearranges time, space, and movement to create a world that compels us to forsake our ordinary surroundings and enter its own realm. The composer encloses us with sounds, at once uniquely particular and yet intangible, sounds that shape their own order of being out of motion, force, and intensity. The dancer leads us into a region of the body transcending itself through vital movement. Each art in its own peculiar fashion evokes a region of sense, feeling, and significance that we are charmed into entering and that carries its own conviction. ‘The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment’, wrote D.H. Lawrence. 14 Whatever art may be, it lays bare the world and gives us the vision to see it.

Now to the extent that art has this power, the artist who can wield it possesses a certain unique responsibility. Unlike the first type of situation in which we described the artist qua person, we are dealing here with the person qua artist. In this special condition the artist incurs the obligation to be faithful to the capacities of his or her art and not succumb to the temptation to exploit it, to manipulate perceivers for external ends, or to deliberately falsify their consciousness. When artists recognize these constraints, they pursue the infinite goal of art to continue the endless fashioning of the real and of the possibilities of the real. When they fail to observe them, artists are not only untruthful but immoral for betraying their art. What Lawrence
said about the novelist is equally true of every artist:

And morality is that delicate, for ever trembling and changing balance between me and my circumambient universe, that precedes and accompanies a true relatedness .... Morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the balance. When the novelist puts his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality.¹⁵

Such moral responsibility is not decreed by boards of censors, government dominated writers’ unions, judicial standards, or religious codes. It is rather a moral claim that comes from the practice of the art itself and from the obligation to use it truthfully and well. That is why art, for Dewey, has a moral office that makes it ‘responsible to life, to the enriching and freeing of its meanings’.¹⁶ Yet from this obligation on the artist comes a claim that artists should strive for a certain integrity not only in themselves but also toward their art. There is what we may call a morality of creativity, one that demands honesty of artists more than truth, that condemns them for acquiescing in formulas and other facile solutions, and that denies artists respect when they repeat themselves without pursuing the artistic search for genuine perceptions.

It may even occur that the demands of art may clash with an artist’s own political or religious convictions, or lead to the personal quandary of an apprentice whose artistic development compels the rejection of the style of the master whom he or she respects and admires. Such a morality rather urges artists to follow the demands of their art and their own creative impulse. Many artists have struggled to observe this self-imposed condition, sometimes, like Rembrandt and Turner, leaving fashion and easy success for a path whose destination was unknown. At times such self-honesty has taken the artist into conflict with society, but the choice has always seemed clear when art and society are opposed. A principle of aesthetic priority seems to be at work, in which the integrity of the artist takes precedence over the comfort of the community. This is not unlike the moral demands on the scientist for clarity, independence, and honesty in research, even at the cost of confronting social conventions. Such obligations fuse the
scientific and moral dimensions of the person.\textsuperscript{17}

Here is where artists’ intent becomes relevant, not to the value of their art, for one can never tell from a work of art whether the artist was sincere, but to the integrity of the artist, whatever influence this may have on his or her capacity to wield the power of art. A concern for an artist’s sincerity recognizes this integrity of intent. Indeed, there is a difference between the artist's sincerity as a person and his or her sincerity as an artist. Sincerity as a person, together with every other personal trait, is an instance of the first type of moral demand, and, in fact, does not even apply here, since it does not have to do with an individual as an artist at all. The fact that Mozart may have been a person of rather low character and that Wagner was detestable, exploiting and betraying his friends and benefactors, is irrelevant to their morality as artists. Sincerity as an artist does concern the person as an artist, and it signifies integrity of intent. Yet insofar as this is artistic, it follows from the integrity, that is, the honesty and truth, of the work.

Thus integrity for the artist is not just working conscientiously and skillfully and devotedly. This trait would not distinguish an artist from any other professional who exhibits those characteristics. Even so, the degree to which artists characteristically manifest professional integrity is exemplary to such an extent that it is common to call anyone an artist who exhibits a high level of integrity in work, whatever that work may be. Integrity as an artist, however, is ultimately the artist's truthfulness to his or her artistic vision. This is no purely personal trait, however, but is inseparable from the work.\textsuperscript{18}

As an artist, then, one incurs a powerful moral commitment that the artist is often the clearest in recognizing. Shortly before his death, the cellist Gregor Piatagorsky observed that ‘every musician, every artist has a heavy responsibility. Though not all of them realize this, to be true to the art they must really forget themselves and devote their lives to something larger in which they believe’.\textsuperscript{19} Buber, in writing of the origin of art, argues a similar case: ‘What is required is a deed that a man does with his whole being .... [W]hoever commits himself may not hold back part of himself; and the work ... is imperious: if I do not serve it properly, it breaks, or it breaks me’\textsuperscript{20}

The obligation of artists to their art turns them into its most severe critics. The artistic
process is characteristically one of constant alteration, forcing a work to meet the demands the artist places on it, and forcing the artist to conform to the demands of the work. Often the artist will return to a work, re-shaping sections, touching it up, sometimes revising thoroughly, as in the case of Brahms, who entirely rewrote his early Piano Trio op. 8 thirty-seven years later, transforming it into a mature composition. Many artists will not complete a work that does not satisfy them, and often reject such productions entirely.

There are times when the integrity of artists to their art is expressed in dramatic ways, but none more than when it becomes destructive. The history of the arts is replete with instances of artists destroying their own works. Sometimes this self-criticism is directed toward early works that the artist sees as journeyman pieces that do not meet the mature standards of later work. It was such a concern for standards that led Brahms to discard many string quartets before allowing only three to be published and Brancusi to destroy many of his early sculptures before La Prière, with which he achieved his artistic identity. Yet destruction is a way of life for many artists, from the printmaker, who routinely selects prints from the print runs and disposes of the unsatisfactory ones, to painters like Albers who cut up and discarded some of his paintings, and Rouault, who is reputed to have eliminated eighty per cent of his work. Undoubtedly the most famous instance of this self-critical stance is that of Kafka, who requested Max Brod to destroy all his manuscripts after his death. Brod recognized his greater obligation to his friend's art than to his friend's wish and preserved the manuscripts, including that of The Trial. Yet this raises the important question of how far an artist should carry the standards of his or her artistic integrity. Was Kafka the ultimately moral artist, or did his criteria overstep the limits of integrity to be self-defeating in their demand for perfection? To the general question of whether artists have a moral obligation to destroy work they no longer approve of, or that they feel dissatisfied with, or that they think failed, the actions of the artists themselves supply the answer. The difficulty, as is usually the case in moral deliberation, lies with the specific case.

**Summary and conclusion**
My purpose here has not been to arrive at principles of moral judgment that hold for artists and to which they must conform, nor have I been concerned with practical questions of implementation and enforcement. Rather there is a prior need to identify the moral situation of artists and to examine its moral standing by exposing the claims that exercise a hold on them. What seems to emerge is that the romantic view or the rationalist ideal of a morally autonomous artist is a myth, even an indulgent and a misleading one. The very circumstance of being an artist places one in a moral situation. By their own cognizance and actions as well as those of others, artists are intensely moral beings, bound by claims of responsibility and obligation more complex and subtle than for most others.

Moral considerations do, then, apply to the artist, but in ways that follow from the character of the situation. Just what these moral claims are depends on which circumstances apply. Certainly the three types cannot always be kept separate or even distinct. Often, perhaps usually, they join and interpenetrate. Yet what is most important is that they are philosophically distinguishable and carry differing moral statuses.

Being an artist does not exempt one from those moral claims that are binding on any person. In so far as their circumstances are not different in kind from those of others, there is no justification for placing artists in a wholly separate moral territory. As an artist one is not privileged but stands bound by the same claims that hold on all, in whatever way an ethics enables us to determine and a code to guide. The judgment of artists as persons does not exempt a Cellini, a Francois Villon, a Genet, or a Pound from the morality of persons. Promising, truth telling, honesty, loyalty, responsibility for the lives and property of others and for the consequences of actions — these circumstances and others like them impose demands on the artist identical with those they exert on others. Croce put it well: ‘For if art is beyond morals, the artist is not, since he is neither beyond nor this side of it, but under its dominion. Insofar as he is a man, the artist cannot shirk the duties of man and should consider art itself — that is not and never will be morals — as a mission, to be practised like a priesthood’. 23

The situation in which the distinctiveness of the artist's profession imposes special moral demands is more difficult, for here lie many of the areas in which conflict occurs between the
artist and common morality, politics, government, and religion. To call for control, however, is precipitous, for it is unlikely that clear causal connections can ever be established. Censorship is difficult to impose, crudely misguided, and self-defeating in its consequences. Nor is there any assurance that honest artistic perceptions will necessarily lead to good social results, and that dishonest ones will produce bad ones. The hope in this last case is that in art, as in politics, their very falseness will ensure their ineffectuality.

Yet there are influences, nonetheless, and for their contribution to the ethos of a culture artists do bear a certain responsibility. Just as a high level of competence and knowledge of current medical developments is an obligation on the physician, as respect for the privacy of confidence is binding on the journalist and the psychiatrist, as a recognition of the possible consequences of research is a moral demand on the nuclear physicist and the molecular biologist, so the influence of art in shaping the mentality of a people imposes obligations on the artist. It is the very recognition of this demand, in fact, that compels a Silone to expose the political manipulation of the Italian peasant, a Rivera and an Orozco the dehumanization of capitalism and the cry for freedom, a Solzhenitsyn the forced labor camps in Siberia. That there is a social obligation on artists seems undeniable, but that this imposes a need for overt control over their art is not.

Yet the truth of artistic vision and its honest pursuit impose unique demands on the artist, and it is here in the conflict between artistic morality and social morality that we face a central issue. The society that chafes under the artist's criticism may do so precisely because of its truth. If the criticisms expressed in art were contrived and far-fetched, the attempt would scarcely be made to suppress them. However, it is the very demand on artists to be true to their perceptions that obligates them to risk the censure of the comfortable in what I called the principle of aesthetic priority. Moreover there is a certain parallel in the contrary case of artists whose artistic perceptions lead them to sincere support for Communism, for Christianity, for capitalism, or for any view that others may consider false or repugnant. Are they propagandists or does their artistic honesty uphold them? Here, too, the same principle of priority would apply, supporting the integrity of the artist's work against hostile criticism in order that it be enabled to present its
perception and offer its contribution to social consciousness.

This is another instance of the general issue of free speech. For a society that believes in freedom of expression as a primary value, artists make a unique contribution. For one that does not, the use of the artists’ works will defer to the social values of unity and stability, although the works themselves cannot be molded without the loss of vision and aesthetic emasculation. The question of whether a society should ever impose its will over artists and their work in any way whatsoever involves a more basic issue, namely whether there are fundamental social values that are grounded in a knowledge to which free discussion, as a means of inquiry, is superfluous, misleading, or detrimental. This is the stand of those for whom the coherence and stability of society are a prime objective, although ideological totalitarianism inevitably leads to social conflict as well as artistic repression in the modern age of globalism, electronic communication, and social flux.

It is hard, moreover, to untangle the motives of integrity and of dishonesty, for the unscrupulous artist may nonetheless masquerade as a staunch defender of artistic freedom. Conflict between the demands of perception and the demands of security is inevitable at times and we cannot legislate an answer. Yet, while direct control may be both unwise and impossible, perhaps a clearer recognition of the artist’s moral status will allow moral consideration to occur rather than dismissing it as irrelevant. Disentangling the artist from the work so that the moral judgment of the one is not a judgment of the other may clarify the issue and allow debate to proceed. And perhaps a more thorough recognition of the integrity of the artistic calling will raise our moral perception of the person who chooses it and develop a moral consciousness in the artist as well as the public that will help to expose those who abuse it.

In this period of changing social and cultural institutions, there is an unqualified claim of artists to pursue their vision with honesty and integrity. There is an equally unqualified claim of society to be concerned about the social effects of any activity, including the artistic. It is the mark of an enlightened society that it will hear the artist's voice and realize that the diagnosis does not make the disease, and that if any action is to be taken, it ought to be against the illness and not against those who identify it. Thus a precarious equilibrium can exist between the two
moral spheres. This is the most one can attain — not harmony but balance. Artists who affirm
the common view for reasons of its (and their) acceptance have forsaken their vision; the society
that forces that affirmation has suppressed its spirit and sacrificed its vitality. Each needs the
other to achieve its own purpose.

There is, then, a two-fold standard. Over those works that affect its well being, society is
justified in wishing to exercise control, no matter who may have made them. But whether that is
wise or can be effective is another matter. Yet over those activities that proceed from the
integrity of the artist to the artist’s work, no constraint is ever proper, whether it be exercised by
a patron, by the state, by society in general, or by the artist.

Artists’ claim to freedom thus has a special force, for without an unhindered range in
which to pursue their perceptions, artists would be left with facility but no art. Their special
contribution must always be observed: discomfort is never a reason for suppression but rather a
reason for support. Until it can be established that a deleterious effect will follow clearly and
specifically from individual works, there is no justification for a society to impose constraints on
the art. Control over the artist, however, has no moral justification. For artists, indeed, the
authority of social morality ceases when confronted by the demands of art. Over the integrity of
the artist’s vision no screen should ever be placed.

Such deep conflicts are a sign of social disequilibrium, but they are not the only moral
force at work. Most art depicts the artist's world, shapes its sensory dimensions, and portrays its
people, events, feelings, confusions, and ideals. In doing so it illuminates the wider social world,
and by sharing that vision and shaping the aesthetic awareness of others, acquires a profoundly
moral stature. Artists, however, unless they choose to serve political ends, are bound by a much
sterner law than that of social morality, and it is the insistence of its demand that is the source of
both the agony and the glory of their calling.
NOTES

1. This chapter is revised from ‘Artists and Morality: Toward an Ethics of Art’, in Leonardo, the Journal of the Contemporary Artist, 10 (Summer 1977), pp. 195-202, copyright by Pergomon Press, and is reprinted by permission. I should like to express my thanks to Professors Marjorie C. Miller, Rolf-Dieter Herrmann, and Morris Grossman, each of whom gave this chapter a careful reading and made many valuable suggestions.

2. Chapter 11, above, developed this idea at some length.

3. Aristotle, Politics, 1340 a-b.


6. Ibid., p. 222.

7. In the case of Glenn Gould, who eventually stopped performing and only recorded, the functions of performer and engineer were combined in the same person. Here there is no ambiguity about the recording's being the original work and not the record of one.

8. The issue of forgery arises in a somewhat different and ambiguous form in the case of the British painter Tom Keating. It is complicated by the fact that the forgeries followed apparently from the acceptance by the purchasers of their false origins, and not from misrepresentation by the painter. Moral culpability would apply here to the originator of the deception, if not the painter, then perhaps the dealer, and if not explicitly, then perhaps implicitly. Keating's case is further confused by the circumstance that the purported forgeries were coupled with the artist's written criticism of the art establishment hidden beneath the painted surface. Cf. The Times (London), 10 August 1976, p. 1; 20 August 1976, pp. i, 13; 29 August, pp. 1, 8.


10. The British director Peter Brook expressed this view as clearly as any in defending his participation in the Shiraz (Iran) festival: ‘The responsibility of each person only exists within the field over which he has some degree of control. In the arts, the relationship with money rests entirely on what one controls: that is, whether having received facilities, one uses them honestly to further whatever purposes one has set oneself, or whether one accepts to distort one's aim to suit the purposes of the people who have given the money or to please the box office’. Similarly, the British playwright Arnold Wesker, after originally supporting the anti-apartheid boycott of
South Africa, writes, ‘If, as I've always maintained, I really believe art to be the most powerful expression by man for man of his attempt to understand and illuminate his condition, then it is foolish to participate in a campaign that deprives people of the consciousness art can bring’. Quoted in Victor S. Navasky, ‘Art, Politics and Torture Chambers’, *The New York Times Magazine*, August 15, 1976, pp. 10, 20. This article offers a good discussion of protests at that period and their efficacy.


17. The demands of honesty, independence, and clarity of thought, the energy and dedication, and the profound and reverend sense for the harmony of the universe — all these are not accidental characteristics of scientists such as Curie and Einstein. The scientific and moral aspects of their beings are not by any means separate, but are different views of the same thing. Gerald Holton, 'Notes on Proposed Study Programs of Ethical Problems Arising from the Development of Science and Technology', UNESCO Symposium on *Science. Ethics, Aesthetics*, SHC/74/CONF/811/15, Paris, 10 June 1974, p. 7.

18. A typical instance of the failure to distinguish the morality of the artist from the morality of the man was made by one music critic in writing about Wagner. After describing the composer's cruelty to his opponents, his misuse and betrayal of his friends, his tantrums, infidelities, dishonesty, and insolent egotism, the writer proceeds to state that in the light of the quantity and stature of Wagner's art, this does not matter in the least. 'The miracle is that what he did in the little space of seventy years could have been done at all, even by a great genius. Is it any wonder that he had no time to be a man?' *Cf.* D. Taylor, *Of Men and Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), p. 8. Beethoven's artlessness and unscrupulousness in dealing with the publisher of his *Missa Solemnis* provides another interesting case where these moralities begin to be distinguished: 'But that a certain unscrupulousness in relation to publishers is not incompatible
with such heights is proved by the existence of the *Missa Solemnis*. It is obvious that whatever moral canons Beethoven violated he did not violate his own, and that they were of a sufficiently lofty character to give us the music we have'. J.W.N. Sullivan, *Beethoven, His Spiritual Development* (New York: Vintage, 1927), p. 128.


24. The decision of artists to participate in government-sponsored programs cannot help but engage them morally in a variety of ways. It is not a matter of principle but rather a complex factual question of effects against effects: the aesthetic effects of the art on the people who come in contact with it, the consequences of the uses of their art by government for political ends, the effects of their example in participating or refusing to participate on government policy on other artists, and on public opinion, and the effects of the decision on artists' opinions of themselves and their art.

25. The judicial 'clear and present danger' criterion may serve as a standard for determining that point at which social control over art, but not over the artist, may be justified. This standard clearly confines control to special circumstances and extreme conditions, and cannot be used to sanction a general policy of constraint. In specific situations, art that directly and deliberately incites riot — but not the prediction of an ensuing disturbance — carries the same justification for social control as non-artistic activity of similar intent.

Chapter XIV

GETTING ALONG BEAUTIFULLY:
Though it may be his needs which drive man into society, and reason which implants within him the principles of social behavior, beauty alone can confer upon him a *social character*. Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it fosters harmony in the individual. All other forms of perception divide man, because they are founded exclusively either upon the sensuous or upon the spiritual part of his being; only the aesthetic mode of perception makes of him a whole, because both his natures must be in harmony to achieve it.


**Traditional grounds for social aesthetics**

In this chapter I want to sketch out the case for a social aesthetics. Relating the theory of the arts to social thought is not common. Indeed, apart from Schiller's tantalizing insights it has rarely been attempted. True, there have been tangential associations of the aesthetic with the social, as in the growing interest in aesthetic education. And, of course, the intersection of art and morality, pondered increasingly, brings the two together, since morality always implicates human relations. Probing this connection more directly and explicitly may be illuminating in surprising ways. Even more, it might contribute to a philosophy of culture. Let us see how this is possible.

It may seem rather strange at first to speak of a social aesthetic. After all, aesthetics has long concerned itself with the arts, with the theory of the arts, that is, and with understanding beauty in nature. And that understanding, as Baumgarten, the originator of modern aesthetics, thought of it, lies in the perfection of sensory awareness. It is easy to see how this can relate to the various arts and to our appreciation of nature. These are preeminently sensory, embracing the full range of perceptual experience in all its modalities, not only by means of the senses but also in the sensory aspects of imaginative experience that involve recollection, or that may even be
predominately cognitive. So understood, perception is broad, indeed, and necessarily so, since it is important to recognize how thoroughly and completely sensation pervades all experience. This domain of perception, especially in the arts, seems to have little to do, at least directly, with the social world. Aesthetics as theory, then, has been seen as the province of the arts, in that attempts to understand the arts lead us to aesthetics. Or, more strictly speaking, the arts and certain aspects of nature are the province of aesthetics, and our experience of them is commonly regarded as intensely personal.

This is the heart of the traditional view, essentially true to the course of its long and respectable history. But if aesthetic theory is to reflect the meaning of the arts in an unprejudicial fashion, we must be prepared to look further. For the arts and their practices suggest the expansion of aesthetics in both interesting and important ways. To show how this is so, how an aesthetics of the arts leads us beyond the arts, let me turn again to the customary account of the aesthetic situation.

According to the usual description, the distinctive pleasure we associate with the arts involves an aesthetic of objects — of art objects and sometimes of objects in nature. These stand at the theoretical center, and most discussion concerns the distinctiveness of such objects, their properties, qualities, and other features, their form and order and the ways in which they may relate to the world beyond, and how these objects are thus aesthetically enjoyable. Complementing this aesthetics of objects is a distinctive way of appreciating them. Once these art objects have been singled out and identified as paintings, sculptures, musical works, theatrical productions, dance performances, and the like, the need arises for a distinctive response, a way of appreciating them that matches their special character with an equally special reception. Balancing this aesthetics of objects, then, is traditionally an attention that is essentially passive and contemplative, a response that delights in those objects for their own sake, without any concomitant application or other purpose — in the usual terminology, disinterestedly.

Curiously enough, this traditional account, this aesthetic of objects and their passive reception, itself leads to the possibility of a social aesthetics. One can develop a sequence of arts
that proceeds from a simple, delimited art object with its correlative response to a condition that transcends that divided order to become, instead, an integral aesthetic-social situation. To begin, a painting, as the paradigm of a single, delimited object, can easily be circumscribed by two dimensions. Enclosed by a frame, this art of the surface is clearly set off from what is around it and offers a clear and convenient focus for the appreciative eye. To these two dimensions, the related art of sculpture adds another. Yet sculpture resembles painting only superficially, for it does not simply thicken the surface and bend it around to achieve a third dimension. Depth, which nearly all painting possesses perceptually, is more than thickness. Sculpture, in contrast, incorporates mass, and mass takes its position among other things in the world. Sculpture is unlike painting in still another respect: It not only fills the space as mass but charges the space around it, creating an aura into which the beholder steps in the act of appreciation.

When we turn to architecture, we find this enlarged space extended inward as well as farther outward. Mass opens within to enclose space, and this interior volume is designed for inhabitants and invites them to occupy it. At the same time, architecture reaches out into the surrounding space far beyond the aura of sculpture, incorporating that space into an ensemble with the physical structure. Such an influence may extend beyond the site and adjoining grounds to contiguous or nearby structures. Artists who construct environments that we can enter and inhabit for a brief time render the enlargement of art more explicit yet. Such environments add to the two dimensions of painting and the third dimension of sculptural mass and architectural space a fourth, temporal dimension. For time enters into the art work as the appreciative observer, who is obliged to become a participant in this art, activates the environment by moving through it.

Despite the theoretical and perceptual constraints of traditional aesthetics, then, we find ourselves well on the way to a social aesthetics, for it is but a short step in this sequence of arts to the social environment. An environment devised by an artist is a fabricated perceptual construct that concentrates features found in every environment. Yet even if a human environment does not originate specifically with an artist, it is a culturally constructed context. And since people
are implicated in all experienced places, we end with situated human relationships, that is, with a social environment. Within the structure of traditional theory, then, we can see how an aesthetics of art objects leads to the possibility of a social aesthetics. We arrive at the same point, moreover, if we start from the correlative of the art object, that is, from the appreciator. For appreciative experience is actually not passive at all but demands, at the very least, attention that is alert and focused. So by introducing a human presence, aesthetics has indeed acquired a social dimension.

These brief observations certainly need to be elaborated further. But it is interesting to observe at this point that a traditional aesthetic of circumscribed objects and disinterested appreciators leads eventually to the social domain. When aesthetic theory is developed contextually, however, the social relevance of the aesthetic is still more pronounced. Let us see how this is.

**Aesthetics as contextual**

Unlike the traditional account, no single or dominant feature establishes an aesthetic situation in a contextual theory: It has no essence. Instead, a number of factors combine to make it distinctive. A contextual theory integrates these features into an inclusive situation.

*acceptance*

In the aesthetic encounter, appreciation involves an openness to experience while judgment is suspended. It takes deliberate effort to set aside selective, restricted attention, the tunnel vision of ordinary life, which centers on specific objects and particular goals. This kind of attention is easily transferred to works of art, setting them apart from other objects and activities. Even Kant retained the teleological form of practical interest, but without a practical object, in his famous ‘purposiveness without purpose’.

The twentieth century fought for the expansion of art against such a limitation and largely established its point. Given the appropriate conditions, anything whatever can now become art.
At the same time as the realm of art has expanded, so too has the range of aesthetic appreciation. Nothing is excluded \textit{a priori}, and we must be willing to enter into appreciation with an open mind. This applies to the situation as much as to the object, especially since the art object has proved dispensable and has sometimes been replaced by concepts, programs, found objects, and even philosophy.

\textit{perception}

Perception is basic in all experience. What makes it important here is its predominance in aesthetic appreciation. We have already noted that Baumgarten established this when he adapted the Greek word \textit{aisthosis}, perception through the senses, as the name of this new discipline, defining aesthetics as the science of sensory knowledge directed toward beauty. Sensory experience is never pure sensation, however, as the psychology of perception and social psychology have long known. Many factors shape our sensory awareness, from the physiology of the brain and other organic functions, to the formative influences of education and the other cultural institutions and practices that construct our belief system, affect our responses, and contribute to the many-layered complexity of perception.

Sensation, nonetheless, lies at the center of this perceptual depth, and it differs from other modes of awareness with different emphases, such as intellectual cognition, mystical bliss, and intense physical activity. Aesthetic perception, ordinarily thought of as peculiar to the arts, has always been at the heart of our appreciation of nature, from small objects of special beauty, such as a blossom or a stone, to monumental ones in the form of a waterfall, a chasm, or an entire landscape. Nothing in the nature of aesthetic perception precludes its appropriateness for objects and situations other than art. Perceptual experience may also dominate certain social occasions, such as moments of affection between parents and children or between friends or lovers, at times of quarrel or hatred, and in other highly qualitative social settings.

\textit{sensuousness}

The senses lie at the heart of perceptual experience and the pleasure they provide gives them special importance here. Traditional aesthetics has been constrained by intellectualist premises
from accepting the full scope of sensory experience. From Plato to Hegel, sight and hearing were declared the sole aesthetic senses, in large part because they are distance receptors and so conform to the contemplative model of knowledge that separates its object and sets it at a distance. Yet all the senses can provide aesthetic satisfaction, including the proximal receptors of tactual, olfactory, gustatory, and subcutaneous kinesthetic perception. Moreover, the common belief that experience flows through separate sensory channels distorts their actual synthesis in perception. In perceptual experience the senses fuse inseparably, a phenomenon called synaesthesia that is especially pronounced in aesthetic appreciation.  


discovery

From the central place accorded perceptual awareness, aesthetic experience is, at least in principle, unconstrained by preconceptions about what can be taken aesthetically. Ordinary experience is guided by signs or cues that often reduce its perceptual content to a mere vestige, sufficient only for recognition, and when experience becomes habitual or routine it loses its aesthetic character. In aesthetic experience, however, the usual order of significance is inverted. Perceptual qualities and experienced meanings become the center of attention, and those features that were once unnoticed or ignored become important. This opens the field of aesthetic experience to unexpected objects and events. And because aesthetic perception is focused and selective, creative and novel ideas and relationships may emerge.

uniqueness

Because every experience is perceptually unique, different in some respects from every other, this takes on special importance in aesthetic appreciation. Even repetitive objects or events never actually duplicate each other, since each repetition resonates with its predecessors, while at the same time projecting its influence on the repetitions that follow. These changes may be small and subtle, but aesthetic awareness is nothing if not discerning.

reciprocity

The interplay that develops among the factors in an aesthetic situation is sometimes overlooked,
yet this invariably occurs in an intense engagement with art. The experience of an art object is deeply affected by the knowledge and attitude of the person who joins with it.\textit{Literature and Aesthetics}, Oct. 1997, 17ff. At the same time the object acts on the beholder and subtly alters the character and quality of awareness. Such reciprocity is highly desirable, for why would we enter the aesthetic if not to engage in such an exchange?

This interplay between art and its appreciator overlaps with similar exchanges involving the other active factors in the aesthetic situation or field, such as the artist and the performer. These may sometimes be different persons but often is simply the re-creative, activating attention of the audience. All these factors may contribute information, interpretive judgment, and other kinds of cognitive content, yet in the experiential context of appreciation they always assume a perceptual mode. The recent interest in interactive art is a difference in degree but not in kind. It makes the dynamic exchange of object, audience, artist, and performer explicit and prominent.\textsuperscript{10}

continuity
Not only do these participating factors interact and overlap, but in the living experience of an aesthetic situation they blend into one another. The distinctions between the constituent elements of the aesthetic field that we draw from a reflective distance fade away, and the divisions and separations that we impose on experience to help us grasp and control it melt into continuities. This is the primary milieu of aesthetic experience and secures its contextual character.

engagement
The concept of engagement encapsulates these features of a contextual aesthetic. Aesthetic engagement renounces the traditional separations between the appreciator and the art object, between the artist and the viewer, and between the performer and these others. The psychological distance that traditional aesthetics imposes between the appreciator and the object of art is a barrier that obstructs the participatory involvement that art encourages. Similarly, the divisions we are in the habit of making among the other factors introduce constraints and oppositions. In contrast with this, boundaries fade away in aesthetic engagement and we experience continuity
directly and intimately. Those who can set aside the preconceptions of aesthetic distance and the
dichotomizing metaphysics underlying traditional aesthetic theory may discover that the fullest
and most intense experiences of art and natural beauty reveal an intimate absorption in the
wonder and vulnerability of the aesthetic.

**Multiplicity**

Because the aesthetic concerns the character of experience itself and is not confined to a
particular kind of object or place, it knows no external or *a priori* restrictions. The occasions on
which aesthetic appreciation can develop are unlimited and can involve any objects whatsoever.
Further, aesthetic involvement need not be rare or restricted. It is limited mainly by our
perceptual capabilities and our willingness to participate. At the same time, aesthetic experience
does not dominate every situation. Often an aesthetic character is subordinate to other demands
and interests, such as religious, practical, technological, or cognitive ones. Sometimes, however,
the aesthetic supervenes on our usual expectations, as when *The Bible* is appreciated for its
literary art and not its religious significance, or when the design of a sewer facility becomes the
opportunity for creating a tidal sculpture, re-creating a habitat for endangered species and
establishing a public-access bay walk, as in Patricia Johanson's 'Endangered Garden' in San
Francisco. And the practice of a craft may fuse aesthetic values inseparably with functional
needs, as in throwing a clay bowl, building a wooden cabinet, or designing a sailboat or an
airplane. In such ways, aesthetic values pervade the entire range of human culture.

These features of the aesthetic situation both establish and reflect its contextual character.
Discussions about art often center on a single factor, most often the art object but sometimes the
appreciator or the artist. Yet they err by synecdoche, taking part of the situation as if it were the
entire domain. Even when the appreciator and the object are regarded as related to each other in
appreciative experience, they are usually still considered basically self-contained. Furthermore, if
we do not also include the creative, re-creative, and performative aspects of such experience, the
same error of partiality occurs and the account remains fragmentary. For this reason, discussions
about expression, representation, formalism, and feeling are likely to misrepresent art. The
concept of the aesthetic field is useful here because it reflects, in an inclusive and convenient way, the interweaving, indeed the fusion, of the objective, perceptual, creative, and performative dimensions of what is actually experienced as integral.\textsuperscript{11}

**Social aesthetics**

Although this account of the contextual character of the aesthetic has considered mainly objects of art and nature, human relations bear a remarkable resemblance to its situational character. At the same time, they reveal the social significance of the aesthetic. How can this be?

Some of the arts suggest this possibility. Consider architecture. To regard architecture merely as the art of building distorts the way in which it actually organizes an entire environment. That is because the design of a building determines not just its own features; it also affects the site on which the building rests and our perception of the structures that stand nearby. Sometimes, in fact, a building casts its character over an entire neighborhood. For buildings are not self-sufficient objects but are places for human activity, determining the patterns of movement toward, into, and out of them, as well as within them. This fact transforms architecture from an art of physical structures into an art of complex social and environmental organization.

Theater also embodies a social aesthetic. The heart of theater does not lie in its physical properties, although theater design, sets, and costumes obviously exert a strong influence. Nor does it lie in the script, although the text is clearly a central factor. But it is in theater’s embodied depiction of social situations and, in particular, of particular human relations, that theater’s special contribution emerges most vividly. Because of this, theater creates an environment that is predominately social, and the aesthetics of theater must build on this base. Film and television harrow the same field, though with different textures, for the nature of these media determines and shapes the qualitative character of the experiences they generate. Film genres and styles vary enormously, to be sure, yet cinema tends, in general, to focus on personal situations with a visual
range and intensity that replace the bodily presence from which so much of theater's special
power derives. As the eyes of the mind, the camera can become a virtuoso performer in its own
right, invisibly directing both conscious and subliminal awareness. Television exhibits a similar
process, but it tends to work best in small-scale situations, where its proximity to the viewer and
frequent close-ups combine with the intimacy of quiet speech to make it possible to create social
situations that have their own distinctive quality.

Each of these preeminently situational arts — architecture, theater, film, and television —
exemplifies a distinguishable mode of aesthetic engagement. Together they constitute a sequence
of aesthetic situations that are essentially social. Each implicates and relies on human
participants in a different way, and each contributes to our understanding of how aesthetic
perception carries social significance. To give an adequate account of this, the usual categories
and principles, especially those that focus on the aesthetic object and its properties, will not do.
In their place we need a social aesthetics.

If we enlarge the field of aesthetic experience and change our focus to allow for an
aesthetics of the social situation, what will this look like? Perhaps it would resemble the
aesthetics of environment, where many contributing factors come together to establish its
aesthetic character and give it a distinctive identity: participants, physical setting, social
conditions, along with time, history, and the powerful influence of culture and tradition, all
joined in the perceptual character of aesthetic experience. Social aesthetics may, in fact, be a
kind of environmental aesthetics, for it is both needless and false to restrict environment to its
physical aspects. No environment that we can know and speak about is without a human
presence; such a thing, in fact, is empirically impossible.\(^{12}\)

Social aesthetics is, then, an aesthetics of the situation. But what identifies this particular
kind of situation? Like every aesthetic situation, social aesthetics is contextual. Furthermore, it is
highly perceptual, for intense perceptual awareness is the foundation of the aesthetic. At work in
social aesthetics are factors similar to those in any aesthetic field, although their specific identity
may be different. While there is no artist, as such, creative processes are at work in its
participants, who emphasize and shape the perceptual features, and supply meaning and interpretation. There is no art object here, of course, but the situation itself becomes the focus of perceptual attention, as it does in conceptual sculpture or in environments. And at the same time as its participants contribute to creating the aesthetic character of the situation, they may recognize with appreciative delight its special qualities, and perhaps work, as a performer would, at increasing and enhancing them. In such a way, a social situation, embodying human relationships, may become aesthetic.

When Schiller attributed the source of social character in human beings to beauty, he found in such experience the ability to harmonize the disparate qualities that, especially in Western culture, compete and conflict with each other. The usual opposition that Schiller identified as the source of this is psychophysical, ‘the sensuous [part]’ and ‘the spiritual part of [our] being’, as he called it. Social harmony is achieved through taste, by which he means a developed aesthetic sensibility. This is not just a state of mind: A harmony of the sensuous and the spiritual demands full participation of all aspects of human perception, since the sensuous is as much body as the spiritual is consciousness, and conversely. A social aesthetic, then, is full integration, integration equally of the personal and the social, a goal as much social as it is aesthetic.

A social situation, then, displays aesthetic characteristics when its perceptual and other characteristic features predominate: full acceptance of the other(s), heightened perception, particularly of sensuous qualities, the freshness and excitement of discovery, recognition of the uniqueness of the person and the situation, mutual responsiveness, an occasion experienced as connected and integrated, abandonment of separateness for full personal involvement, and the relinquishing of any restrictions and exclusivity that obstruct appreciation.

It is important not to leave this argument in the abstract, for many common social occurrences lend themselves to aesthetic experience and analysis. Each of these invites a fuller discussion of how it may take on a predominately aesthetic character. Nor is that character exclusive, for these settings also fuse moral and social values with aesthetic
Aesthetic social situations

Proper etiquette is ordinarily interpreted as rule-governed behavior, conventions that are devoid of any real content but that serve to facilitate social interaction by establishing regular patterns. Yet there are occasions when the cultivation of such behavior assumes a certain grace, when the participants delight in the skills involved and at the same time manage to introduce genuine human content into what is usually empty ritual. When this occurs, discovery, perception, reciprocity, and the other aesthetic features overcome the sterile formalism often associated with etiquette. In much the same way, other rituals, whether religious or social, may turn into aesthetic situations. Religious rituals sometimes become full-fledged theater, and living drama often occurs at celebrations and festivals.

There are entire societies that seem to possess the harmony Schiller talked about. One such culture is the Foi, a tribe living in Papua New Guinea. Foi society is constituted aesthetically, with close connections between language and movement, both in relation to dwelling and to the overall territory. No boundaries exist between mind and body or the being of life and the being of death, a continuity that Foi sung poetry reveals as the basic conditions of spatial and temporal life. Furthermore, this poetry is fundamental in the discursive life of their communally lived world.\textsuperscript{13} Guinea (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991), p. 8.

Such aesthetically integrated societies are undoubtedly rare, but many kinds of social situations exist in less favored societies that at times exhibit the qualities of an aesthetic situation. Relations with small children, for example, often take on an aesthetic character when our judgment of bodily presence is suspended and perception becomes heightened by a special delight in sensory qualities such as freshness, delicacy, fragility of expression, coloration -- qualities of the sort Rubens depicted in the drawing of his son, Nicholas, as a child. On such occasions one can easily discern other aesthetic features: discovery, uniqueness, reciprocity, continuity, engagement, and the possibility of multiple occurrences of the same sort. These traits
of an aesthetic situation occur in much the same way in close friendships where, as Aristotle noted, perfect friendship rests on mutual trust, provides for the good of the other, and is a situation in which the friend's good is inseparable from one's own.\textsuperscript{14}

It may be, however, that the deepest and most intense occasions of a social aesthetic occur in the many forms that love may take. Indeed, Aristotle's account of perfect friendship leaves little to distinguish it from love. 'Love' is an over-used word in human relations, but until recently it has been uncommon in philosophy. On the other hand, 'beauty' is a common term in philosophy but not in describing human relations. Can we pair their rarities and write a philosophy of love about beautiful relationships and, perhaps at the same time, a philosophy of beauty about the relationships of love? For both beauty and love are relational ideas and not formal features of objects. Better still, they are characteristics of a situation.

Of the many ways to pursue their connection, little has been said of how love can be illuminated through the traits of an aesthetic situation.\textsuperscript{15} But it is equally important to show how love is at the same time a manifestation of beauty. Although there is much to explore here, let me comment on only one feature of that situation, perhaps its key feature and the one that implies the others, as well: aesthetic engagement.

Shakespeare is probably the best known but hardly the first to recognize that music may be an aphrodisiac. Long before, Plato had observed its seductive power with distress.\textsuperscript{16} Yet whether sustenance or stimulus, music — or any art, for that matter — can do more than excite amorous passions. Art goes far beyond being only a cause or an accompaniment here. To treat it in these ways is to think of art as if it were separate from love, related yet distinct and apart. Isn't there a more intimate association that holds among the arts and the passions, more precisely between art and love, a relationship that involves more than one being simply an occasion or condition of the other?

I think that there is, but it is no thread joining externals, no curious connection of separates. It resembles, rather, a relationship of consanguinity, and one of siblings rather than parent and child. For, I suggest, art and love have in common the characteristics we associate
with the aesthetic. What is different is more the participants than the occurrence, more the kind of activity that is involved than the kind of experience we enter into. The one concerns human relationships, although, like Thoreau, a person may love a landscape, a place, a home, or an object.17 (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1980), p. 285. The other involves a fusion of appreciator, object, artist, and activator. Surely some kinds of love reflect a similar experience.

Although art and love show clear differences, their resemblances are striking. Whatever else may be involved in art, dwelling on the features of the object occupies a central place. In the full appreciative engagement of art, what often develops is a sense of personal exchange with the image in the painting or with its pictorial qualities; a sharing of the dynamic progression of the work, as in the unfolding of a musical composition; an intimate involvement in the sequence of movement in a dance and the dramatic raveling and unraveling of a play or a novel; and in theater, the presence of a human situation or condition that may take the form of a momentary awareness or a shocking realization, as in an epiphany, or a feeling of kinship or human empathy.

Yet these are the very signs of love, the common strand in its multitude of forms and instances: a personal exchange, a sharing of dynamic progression, perhaps a sense of dramatic development, the awareness of a rare human situation, a feeling of empathy or kinship. In both art and love we may have a sense of being in place, of a dissolution of barriers and boundaries, of communion. And in both an intimate connection can develop. Such connectedness, such continuity, such engagement lie at the very center of the aesthetic, occurring with great intensity on the most notable occasions, and paler on the lesser, more usual ones.

Others have corroborated such a bond. In her essay on ‘Human Personality’, Simone Weil speaks of ‘a type of attention, converging upon love, that enables the attender to commune with an object (or person) at the level of the impersonal--seeing it with acuity, understanding, and affection’.18 Nicolson, New York, 1986). I am indebted to Prof. Hilde Hein for this reference. Communing with an object characterizes aesthetic engagement, while the impersonal here refers to the loss of a discrete, separate sense of self. In an oddly parallel fashion Thoreau likened the
aesthetic relation with nature to a loving friendship: ‘As I love nature, as I love singing birds, and gleaming stubble, and flowing rivers, and morning and evening, and summer and winter, I love thee my Friend’. But most important by far are the general resemblances of love to aesthetic contact, continuity, participation, and engagement. These suggest a structural similarity, an isomorphism, so to say, between these two most human of experiences. We might, indeed, describe art and love equally as aesthetic situations. Both involve acceptance without judgment and, at their best, both exhibit free value. After we excise the negative elements of possessiveness, exploitation, insecurity, egoism, jealousy, and power, much of what is left in human relationships is its aesthetic character. This is found in the many forms that love takes with friends, with children, with partners. A lesson for morality lies in recognizing the importance of free value, rare and fleeting though it be. Both love and art dwell, too, in the perceptual domains of sense, imagination, and memory, and both are attentive to the sensory qualities of the situation. A rich love relation, like good art, holds new and surprising awareness, cognition, and re-cognition. The peculiar individual features of the art or love object become the focus of attention: It is ultimate particularity.


Further, both art and love evoke mutuality among the factors and forces in the aesthetic situation. The various arts and the different modes of love exhibit reciprocity in ways that are similar, the participating factors coming to blend into each other. for Himself, an Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics (Holt, New York, 1947). Ch. IV, 1. Divisions and separations disappear and are replaced by a sense of empathy. These connections are personal ones, for both art and love evoke a sense of shared living, a certain continuity and oneness, an intimacy in which divisions disappear. Love, indeed, is a binding force that melts boundaries. Empedocles knew this in the fifth century B.C.E., when he described love as the attracting and unifying force in the universe. (Blackwell, Oxford, 1952), fragments 18-21. Finally, both possess uniqueness without exclusivity, for various and diverse occasions and relationships are possible. This is not love of the beautiful or love as the path to the beautiful, which Plato's Socrates learns from
Diotima in *The Symposium*. It is rather love as beauty, together both manifold and irreducible.\(^{24}\)

**The politics of social aesthetics**

This confluence of the aesthetic and the social carries us eventually to that domain in which the social formalizes itself in political patterns. Here a social aesthetics has significant and powerful implications. Schiller again points the way:

> No privilege, no autocracy of any kind, is tolerated where taste rules, and the realm of aesthetic semblance expends its sway .... In the Aesthetic State everything — even the tool which serves — is a free citizen, having equal rights with the noblest .... Here, in the realm of Aesthetic Semblance, we find that ideal of equality fulfilled which the Enthusiast would fain see realized in substance.\(^{25}\)

> Is ‘the Aesthetic State’ merely a metaphor for the aesthetic situation? Or does it, in fact, have genuinely political implications?\(^{26}\) Could it perhaps be both? If it is in some sense political, then what is equal in the aesthetic state? Does the aesthetic suggest a different sense of equality from the many meanings and practices that have been urged since the Stoics and early Christians? There is a special contribution that the aesthetic can make to this most fundamental of ethical and political concepts. We can explore this best by untangling some of the implications that an aesthetic model holds for political order and, in a similar way, for other social institutions.\(^{27}\)

> The social equivalent of the willing acceptance in an aesthetic situation lies in recognizing the intrinsic value of every person. Like the readiness to engage aesthetically in all kinds of experience, the fundamental acceptance of each person is the precondition of a social ethics. No one is excluded *a priori*. No classification stands between a person and his or her inherent worth: not race, religion, ethnicity, private history, level of cultivation, or any other
category by which we lose the person in the generality. This accords with the ethical ideal that holds all people as morally equal, irrespective of all other differences.

The aesthetic emphasis on perception suggests that judgments of worth, whether they apply to actions, practices, laws, people, or institutions, be based on the immediacy of the experience to which they lead, on their empirical manifestations and not on rules, principles, or other substitutes for experience. The sensuousness in aesthetic awareness has its parallel in the fact of human embodiment in the political order. People are flesh and blood creatures, not statistics, blocs, classes, districts, or votes. The political equivalent of discovery lies in an openness to new ideas and to change that comes from wide participation in social decision-making. The idea of aesthetic uniqueness provides a special meaning. Equality is not exhausted by the notion of a common moral standing, crucial though this be. It suggests, in addition, that human beings are ultimately never commensurable, and that whatever generic endowments they may exhibit, individual people possess ultimate and irreducible particularity.

Reciprocity lies at the heart of the democratic process, for it takes the essential interplay and fusion that develop in aesthetic experience as a model for social and political order. This means that an aesthetic state must be non-authoritarian and non-hierarchical, and that the imposition of force or power in any form must be rejected in the social dynamic. Genuine reciprocity transforms all parties to the process, as difficult to achieve as it is desirable. Yet how else can true reconciliation and collaboration take place? This turns aesthetic continuity into aesthetic community, a social ideal that promotes cooperation, not conflict, and it dissolves the class divisions and other such separations that impede continuity. By reconciling oppositions and promoting humane connections within a social group, the social equivalent of aesthetic engagement encourages intimacy in personal relations and rejects formalized structures that separate people and form them into oppositions. And we find in the openness and readiness to enter into multiple aesthetic occasions a basis for the social pluralism to which free association freely leads.  

We may ask, finally, what claim the aesthetic can make as a social model. It is easy to
dismiss the aesthetic state for being as naive as it is noble. Perhaps it does exceed the grasp of our faulty institutions and the flawed people who run them. Yet maybe its rarity has more to do with cynicism, narrow purposes, and an ignoble spirit than with impossibility. For such an aesthetic community does in fact exist in more limited forms, imperfectly and impermanently, perhaps, but nonetheless actually, in art, in love, in societies like the Foi, in families, and in many small, intentional groups and communities throughout the world. It may be that a modest scope is the precondition for an aesthetic social order.

However one judges the possibility of attaining it, a social aesthetic remains a distinctive, fresh, and illuminating approach to human relations, whether as friendship, family, or state. It is flexible and adaptable to different kinds of situations. It takes a positive approach to social order, replacing the pattern of conflict — a repressive standard that rests on a social dynamic of power and is really a model of violence, however masked in benign language or pious ideology — with a model of mutuality and support, which is really a model of love. Ultimately and best, in giving new meaning to tolerance, reciprocity, and equality, a social aesthetic offers the basis for a truly humane community. Isn't this what Schiller was leading us to see?
NOTES


2 Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), ed. and


5 Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment (1790), §10.

6 Baumgarten, Aesthetica.

7 Hegel follows Plato’s restriction of the sensuous aspect of art to the ‘aesthetic’ (theoretical) senses of sight and hearing, since the work of art is halfway between the directly perceived material object (and thus retains sensuousness) and the ideal universal of pure thought. The aesthetic senses should have no direct physical relation to (connection with) the object. G.W.F. Hegel, The Philosophy of Fine Art, in A. Hofstadter and R. Kuhns, eds., Philosophies of Art and Beauty (The Modern Library, New York, 1964), p. 409. See also A. Berleant, Re-thinking Aesthetics, Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, forthcoming 2004), Ch. V, “The Sensuous and the Sensual in Aesthetics”.

8 See, for example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith

9 Wolfgang Welsch, ‘Aesthetics beyond Aesthetics: Toward a New Form of the Discipline’,


11 See The Aesthetic Field. Ch. 1, ‘Surrogate Theories of Art’, is also a critique of partial theories.

complements the present one.

13 James F. Weiner, *The Empty Place: Poetry, Space, and Being among the Foi of Papua, New*

14 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. VIII, Chs. 4 (1157a) and 5 (1157b).

15 An important exception is Guy Sircello's rich exploration in *Love and Beauty* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989). He and others have illuminated the subject from other perspectives than the one taken here.


18 ‘Human Personality’, in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. Sian Miles (Weidenfeld and

19 See note 12.

20 ‘Even with Tomas she was obliged to behave lovingly because she needed him. We can never establish with certainty what part of our relations with others is the result of our emotions — love, antipathy, charity, or malice — and what part is predetermined by the constant power play among individuals. True human goodness, in all its purity and freedom, can come to the fore only when its recipient has no power. Mankind's true moral test, its fundamental test (which lies deeply buried from view), consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animals. And in this respect mankind has suffered a fundamental debacle, a debacle so fundamental that all others stem from it’. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (Harper & Row, New York, 1984), p. 289.

21 ‘To love everyone is a noble enterprise. Unfortunately it denies one a certain faculty of

22 If this is true, then one-sided love is a misnomer, much as Fromm interprets self-love as selfishness. Narcissism and subjective self-indulgence fail in the same way. Erich Fromm, *Man

23 Empedocles, *On Nature*, in *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, ed. K. Freeman


25 Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, para. 11.

26 Josef Chytry, in *The Aesthetic State* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), draws his title and much of his inspiration from Schiller. For Chytry, the ‘“aesthetic state” ... stand[s] for a social and political community that accords primacy ... to the aesthetic dimension in human consciousness and activity ...’

27 ‘Environmental aesthetics 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

28 See my ‘Aesthetics of Community’, note 12 above.
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