

ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS: THE PROBLEM OF HOW TO AESTHETICALLY APPRECIATE NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS (quotes from the presentation)

Allen Carlson

THE NEGLECT OF THE AESTHETICS OF NATURE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

“Open an eighteenth-century work on aesthetics, and the odds are it will contain a substantial treatment of the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque in nature....In our own day, however, writings on aesthetics attend almost exclusively to the arts and very rarely indeed to natural beauty, or only in the most perfunctory manner. Aesthetics is even *defined* by some mid-century writers as ‘the philosophy of art’, ‘the philosophy of criticism’, analysis of the language and concepts used in describing and appraising art-objects.”

--Ronald Hepburn, “Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty,” in *British Analytical Philosophy*, eds. B. Williams and A. Montefiore (Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1966) p. 285.

THE INSTITUTIONAL THEORY OF ART: THE CLASSIC FORMULATION

“A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld).”

--George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Cornell, 1974) p. 34.

***BERLEANT'S UNIFIED AESTHETICS REQUIREMENT**

What is required is not an aesthetics that “harbors two dissimilar types of phenomena, one concerning art and another nature”...but rather an aesthetics of art and nature in which “both actually involve a single all-embracing kind of experience, which requires a comprehensive theory to accommodate it.”

--Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Temple, 1992) p. 161.

THE NON-AESTHETIC APPROACH TO NATURE APPRECIATION

“The conceptual structure of an aesthetic judgement includes a reference to a creator; i.e. an artist. It follows...that only artifacts which have been fashioned with the intention of being, at least, in part, objects of aesthetic judgment can be objects of aesthetic judgement....Nature cannot be the object of aesthetic appreciation.”

--Don Mannison, “A Prolegomenon to a Human Chauvinistic Aesthetic,” in *Environmental Philosophy*, eds. D. Mannison, M. McRobbie, and R. Routley (Australian National University, 1980) pp. 212, 216.

***ZIFF'S ANYTHING VIEWED DOCTRINE**

“...unless one has a compelling narcissistic obsession with the marks of men's endeavors one can view things in the world aesthetically without being concerned with or inhibited by their lack of status as artifacts....anything that can be viewed can fill the bill of an object fit for aesthetic attention and none does it better than any other.”

--Paul Ziff, “Anything Viewed,” in *Essays in Honor of Jaakko Hintikka*, eds. E. Saarinen, R. Hilpinen, I. Niiniluoto, and M. Hintikka (Reidel, 1979) pp. 286-287, 293.

APPRECIATIVE MISTAKES AND OMISSIONS

“Supposing that a person's aesthetic education...instills in him the attitudes, the tactics of approach, the expectations proper to the appreciation of art works only,...such a person will either pay very little aesthetic heed to natural objects, or heed them in the wrong way. He will look--and of course look in vain--for what can be found and enjoyed only in art...[He] can neither intelligently pursue nor adequately comprehend the experience of natural beauty, save only in its most rudimentary forms.”

--Ronald Hepburn, “Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty,” in *British Analytical Philosophy*, eds. B. Williams and A. Montefiore (Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1966) p. 301.

THE VALORIZATION OF THE SCENIC

“The picturesque...approach to nature has... encouraged us to look for and appreciate primarily the *scenically* interesting and beautiful parts of our environment. As a result those environments devoid of effective pictorial composition, excitement, or amusement (that is, those not worthy of being represented in a picture) are considered lacking in aesthetic values.”

--Yuriko Saito, “The Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998) p.101.

***BUDD'S AS NATURE CONSTRAINT**

"...just as the aesthetic appreciation of art is the appreciation of art as art, so the aesthetic appreciation of nature is the aesthetic appreciation of nature as nature. For, given that the natural world is not anyone's artefact, the aesthetic appreciation of nature as nature, if it is to be true to what nature actually is, must be the aesthetic appreciation of nature not as an intentionally produced object (and so not as art)."

--Malcolm Budd, "The Aesthetics of Nature," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100 (2000) p. 138.

THE AESTHETICS OF ENGAGEMENT

"The boundlessness of the natural world does not just surround us; it assimilates us. Not only are we unable to sense absolute limits in nature; we cannot distance the natural world from ourselves. Perceiving environments from within, as it were, looking not at it but being in it, nature...is transformed into a realm in which we live as participants, not observers...the aesthetic mark of all such times is...total engagement, a sensory immersion in the natural world."

--Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Temple, 1992) pp. 169-170.

***HEPBURN'S SERIOUS BEAUTY INTUITION**

"Suppose the outline of a cumulo-nimbus cloud resembles that of a basket of washing, and we amuse ourselves in dwelling upon this resemblance. Suppose that on another occasion we...try instead to realize the inner turbulence of the cloud, the winds sweeping up within and around it, determining its structure and visible form. Should we not...say that this latter experience was less superficial...than the other, that it was truer to nature, and for that reason more worth having?...If there can be a passage, in art, from easy beauty to difficult and more serious beauty, there can also be such passage in .aesthetic contemplation of nature."

--Ronald Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty," in *British Analytical Philosophy*, eds. B. Williams and A. Montefiore (Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1966) p. 305.

THE COGNITIVE NATURALISM APPROACH TO NATURE APPRECIATION

"...our appreciation of nature is aesthetic and is analogous to that of art in both its nature and its structure. The significant difference is that while in art appreciation...the knowledge given by art criticism and art history are relevant, in nature appreciation...the knowledge is that provided by natural history--by science. But this difference is not unexpected; nature is not art."

--Allen Carlson, "Nature and Positive Aesthetics," *Environmental Ethics* 6 (1984) pp. 27-28.

"If to appropriately aesthetically appreciate art we must have knowledge of art forms, classifications of works, and artistic traditions, then to appropriately aesthetically appreciate nature we must have knowledge of different natural environments and of the different systems and elements within those environments. As the knowledge provided by art critics and art historians equips us to aesthetically appreciate art, that provided by naturalists, ecologist, geologists, and natural historians equip us to aesthetically appreciate nature."

--Allen Carlson, "Aesthetic Appreciation and the Natural Environment," in *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, eds. R. Botzler and S. Armstrong (McGraw Hill, 1998) p. 128.

***THOMPSON'S OBJECTIVITY DESIDERATUM**

"The link...between aesthetic judgment and ethical obligation fails unless there are objective grounds--grounds that rational, sensitive people can accept--for thinking that something has value. If beauty in nature...is merely in the eyes of the beholder, than no general moral obligation arises out of aesthetic judgments. A judgment of value that is merely personal and subjective gives us no way of arguing that everyone ought to learn to appreciate something, or at least to regard it as worthy of preservation."

--Janna Thompson, "Aesthetics and the Value of Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 17 (1995) p. 292.