

*The Aesthetics of  
Natural Environments*



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## The Aesthetics of Art and Nature

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### I.

The title of this essay masks a deliberate ambiguity, one that is, in fact, its central issue. Few would deny the possibility of obtaining aesthetic satisfaction from both works of art and from nature, customarily in the case of the first and under certain conditions in the other. But what *sort* of satisfaction is this, and is it the same kind in nature as in art?

The usual course, perhaps the most intuitively obvious, is to recognize that aesthetic value exists in both domains but, for historical and philosophical reasons, to find that the kind of appreciation each encourages is essentially different. Another possibility is to associate contemporary environmental art with seventeenth and eighteenth century gardens, then regarded as a high art, demonstrating a unity of art and nature in both, and implying that they share a common aesthetic.<sup>1</sup> A third choice, the converse of this, is to take environmental appreciation as the standard and to reinterpret the artistic aesthetic by the natural. The question hidden in my title, then, is whether there is one aesthetic or two, a single aesthetic that encompasses both art and nature, or one that is distinctively artistic and another that identifies the appreciation of natural beauty.

This is more than a question in the grammar of number, and it is, in my judgment, more than a minor issue in aesthetics. Rather, it provokes some of its central concerns: the nature of art, the identifying features of aesthetic appreciation, and the larger connections of the theory of appreciation with other philosophical issues. These last include matters that were once regarded as central but are now largely consigned to the margins, such as noumenal and transcendent experience, and occasions that seem to test the extent of the aesthetic response, such as extreme environmental conditions.<sup>2</sup> It may indeed be that the philosophy of nature is no peripheral matter, either aesthetically or, more generally, philosophically, and that ultimately it engages the very heart of philosophy. The intent of this essay is, in fact, to suggest this by moving toward a naturalizing of aesthetics, as it were, recognizing its association and continuity with other regions of experience, and toward identifying the aesthetic as a critical dimension of the value that binds together the many domains of the human world.

Such a large project requires specificity. What will occupy me here is the more

limited question of whether aesthetics harbors two dissimilar types of phenomena, one concerning art and another nature, or whether both actually involve a single all-embracing kind of experience that requires a comprehensive theory to accommodate it. It would be coy to plead uncertainty at this point in the discussion, for it is indeed my purpose to make a case for a general theory, without denying the diversity of individual experience and the divergent cultural factors in our encounters with both art and nature. A general aesthetic must acknowledge these differences, and its ability to do so is the test of its success. For it is precisely the failure of traditional aesthetics to accommodate the enlargement of the objects, activities, and occasions that have characterized much of the art of the past hundred years that has contributed to our present dilemma concerning nature and art.

The traditional view of aesthetic appreciation is that a special attitude is required, one of disinterested and contemplative attention to an object for its own sake. The watchword is, of course, "disinterested," for Kant's legacy in making it central in appreciation has shaped the course of aesthetics over the past two centuries. It is precisely by setting aside interest, "either of sense or of reason," as Kant put it, that we become capable of receiving aesthetic satisfaction. Assuming a disinterested attitude thus frees us from the distractions of practical purposes and permits us to dwell freely on an object or a representation, which we can then regard as beautiful.

This definition of the boundaries of the aesthetic carries important implications. To aid in achieving disinterestedness, it is important to circumscribe art objects by clear borders, and the classical arts exhibit many features that seem designed to accomplish this: the frame of a painting, the pedestal for sculpture, the proscenium arch in theater, the stage for dance, music, and other performing arts. To some extent these were deliberate developments. Shaftesbury, who preceded Kant and actually provided much of the originality of conception to which Kant later gave philosophical order and structure, had argued that art must be enclosed within borders instead of spreading across walls, ceilings, and staircases, so that it may be grasped in a single view. It became important to isolate the object of beauty, singling it out for those special aesthetic qualities that succeeding generations of aestheticians have vainly attempted to define. This view led, too, to a focus on the internal attributes of the art object, such as its self-sufficiency, completeness, and unity. These traits came to identify the character and object of aesthetic appreciation, and they set the direction of aesthetic inquiry that has dominated discussion to the present.<sup>3</sup>

By circumscribing the domain of aesthetics, this formulation recognized a distinct aesthetic sensibility and encouraged a body of scholarship that came to constitute the new discipline of aesthetics. However, it also had some awkward consequences. One has to do with its difficulties in dealing with architecture. If we put enough distance between ourselves and a building, we may possibly comprehend it in a single view. But surely a building is more than an object seen from a distance. It is meant to be entered, to be moved through, to house activities of some

sort. We have seen how the only recourse for traditional aesthetics was to place these various roles in separate domains. Indeed, that has been the regular ploy of aesthetics when forced to defend the integrity of beauty against the incursions of utility: separate the various aspects of the object in order to keep art from being sullied by any association with practical activities or ends.

Compromise, then, permitted architecture to retain its place among the fine arts. But it was an uneasy compromise, for in practice it is impossible to maintain for long any real division between beauty and utility. Not only are form and function related, but the perception of space, surface, sound, and pattern can profoundly affect a building's practical success, influencing the movement, the efficiency, the very mood of its users. Nor can the performing arts retain their purity as contemplative objects by separating themselves physically from their surroundings. For despite the tactic of placing musical and dance performances in a separate space above the plane occupied by the audience, these arts possess the uncanny ability to insinuate themselves into our bodies, stirring up somatic and affective responses, and engaging us in ways that are difficult to reconcile with the contemplative ideal. It is even harder to distance oneself from literature, for here the art employs our very consciousness to lead us into its enchanted realm. In fact, it seems that we have a theory of the arts that is actually modeled on only one kind—the visual arts of painting and sculpture—and that has been extended to the others at the price of plausibility. And even in those supposedly visual arts its appropriateness can be questioned.<sup>4</sup>

Some serious problems encumber traditional aesthetics, then, in the domain of the fine arts. But what happens when this conception of art becomes the model for appreciating nature? Here even greater difficulties appear. Shaftesbury had wanted to deal with beauty in nature as contemplative and not as active, of practical use, owned, or involved with desires.<sup>5</sup> And indeed some devices seem to turn environment into a contemplative object: the scenic outlook over a panoramic landscape, an allée viewed from a terrace, the formalism of a French garden.

Yet does aesthetic appreciation cease when we enter a path and move into the landscape or walk down the allée? Most gardens, even French ones, draw us into intimate views, encouraging us to make a reciprocal contribution through our movement and change of location and vantage. Moreover, the distancing that is so important a part of traditional appreciation is difficult to achieve when one is surrounded by the "object." As with earth art, we are on the same plane, in the same space as the blossom or tree we are regarding. In fact, what the Japanese stroll garden accomplishes by requiring our active cooperation in walking and positioning ourselves merely extends and amplifies factors present in all environmental experience.<sup>6</sup> In order to safeguard aesthetic contemplation one may be forced, ironically, to abandon nature entirely in favor of its representation in art. It seems easier to contemplate a landscape painting than a landscape, for painting frames the scene, offering it as an object for disinterested regard. There are no annoying insects to distract one, no wind to ruffle one's hair, no precarious foot-

ing or dizzying heights. One can adopt a disinterested stance without danger or fear of disruption.

The inadequacies of traditional aesthetics for the appreciation of nature rest on still other grounds. Some commentators associate the enjoyment of art with the appreciation of the skill and originality that went into creating the art object. For them, art appreciation centers on our admiration of the creativity embodied in the design of a work. Since this is not present in nature, one must have recourse to something different. One may conclude that a separate aesthetic is needed, an aesthetic that bases our appreciative response on the awareness, selection, and understanding of the order by which natural forces have produced the objects we admire. The appreciation of order in nature, then, replaces the appreciation of design in art. Each provides the basis of a separate aesthetic, one for art and another for nature, and traditional aesthetics remains intact.<sup>7</sup>

The solution that there are different sorts of appreciation in art and nature remains indebted to the traditional aesthetics of Shaftesbury and Kant. For its central premise is that appreciation is directed toward an aesthetic object—a designed object in art, an ordered object in nature. And indeed this dual aesthetic is a reasonable consequence of that premise: such dissimilar objects seem to require different accounts of their creation and meaning.

It is more than coincidental that both the traditional theory and its dualistic compromise rest on the premise of objectification. Yet does this premise follow from the appreciative experience of art and nature, or is the perception rather dictated by the theory? A world of objects may seem easier to circumscribe and control, but this is not the world of lived experience.<sup>8</sup> If we regard the painting of a landscape disinterestedly from a distance, we get a contemplative object, but what of the appreciation of an actual landscape? Here the problems with objectification are more troublesome. It is, as we have seen, far more difficult to objectify environment than art.

But does the objectification premise in fact survive in either case? For it is not nature alone that troubles conventional aesthetics. In fact, the applicability of traditional theory to painting lasted barely a century, although whether it ever really suitably accounted for aesthetic fulfillment is itself debatable.<sup>9</sup> Yet since the Impressionists' dissolution of represented objects into atmosphere and of art objects into perceptual experiences, the visual arts have increasingly followed the nonconfining pattern of the other arts. The picture frame has come to function not so much as an enclosure than as a facilitator for focusing our gaze into the painting, and this internal focusing eludes the very objectification that the traditional aesthetic intended to ensure.

Such developments in painting make reference to the beholder, and the viewer's participation is required to complete the work. What the multiple planes of cubism do in fragmenting static objects, the intense energy of the futurists does in dissolving dynamic ones: both transform objects into experiences. Just as optical art forces an interplay between eye and painting, photorealism confronts the viewer

with giant images. Even sculpture, which would seem to preserve the separateness of the object by removing it to a higher spatial plane, has followed the same course, not just by emphasizing the dynamic forces of the work, as with Bourdelle, but by stressing the powers that emanate from the piece to energize the surrounding space and, like *Laocoön*, entrap the viewer. Yet this merely emphasizes the charmed space, the magical effusion of all good sculpture. More recent work has, of course, tended to dispense with the pedestal entirely and lead the viewer into physical interplay, as with Calder's stables and di Suvero's ride 'em pieces. And earthworks and environmental art extend far beyond the restrictive conventions of the traditional model by the use they may make of natural substances and by the bond they may project to their site.<sup>10</sup> These works involve the viewer as well, not only through the forceful message they may embody about our relation to nature, but by the direct physical participation that appreciation often requires. We are beginning to discover that the history of the modern arts is more a history of perception than a history of objects, and that perception, moreover, is not just a visual act but a somatic engagement in the aesthetic field. Such a development the traditional object-oriented theory is hard put to account for.

## II.

If conventional aesthetics impedes our encounter with the arts, it obstructs even more the appreciation of nature. For much, perhaps most, of our appreciative experience of nature exceeds the limits of a contemplative object and refuses to be constrained within discrete boundaries. If we are going to need a separate aesthetic for nature, why be burdened with a model so alien to experience? To avoid the difficulties in distancing nature and in assimilating natural objects to the appreciative requirement of design, what seems to be needed is an account appropriate to the distinctive qualities and demands of environment. What form might this take?

There is irony in the persistent division between the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, that sharp distinction between the natural and the cultural sciences that endeavors to protect the latter by giving cognitive status to a separation between nature and the human: the hard sciences deal with nature, the soft ones with culture. Yet the distinction itself is belied when art, one of the domains of culture, does no better than emulate the natural scientific model by adopting its conventions of objectification, distancing, and disinterested, contemplative regard.

This is not only inadequate for explaining the arts, as we have just seen. The division between nature and culture fails in another respect: it misrepresents nature. For the natural world cannot be circumscribed as easily as the classic account would have it. Nature, in the sense of the earth apart from human intervention, has mostly disappeared. We live in a world profoundly affected by human action, not just in the nearly complete destruction of the planet's primeval wilderness or in the distribution of flora and fauna far from their original habitats, but in

the alteration of the shape and character of the earth's surface, its climate, its very atmosphere.

It is true that nature, unlike cultural artifacts, seems obdurate: it may bend but it will not disappear. Yet it bends in strange ways. We are beginning to realize that the natural world is no independent sphere but is itself a cultural artifact. Not only is nature affected pervasively by human action, but our very conception of nature has emerged historically and differs widely from one cultural tradition to another. What we mean by nature, our beliefs about wilderness, the recognition of landscape, our very sense of environment have all made a historical appearance and been understood differently at different times and places.<sup>11</sup> No wonder that an aesthetics that aspires, like the sciences, to universality has difficulty accommodating nature.

There are good reasons, then, for the fact that until recently philosophers have not devoted much attention to the aesthetics of nature. Yet it was the very philosopher who attempted to formalize the structure of a universal aesthetics, Immanuel Kant, who took an important step here. His idea of the sublime captures one aspect of the aesthetic experience of nature—the capacity of the natural world to act on so monumental a scale as to exceed our powers of framing and control, and to produce in their place a sense of overwhelming magnitude and awe. A similar condition occurs in the extreme environments of desert and ice. These deserve the appellation “sublime” because here, too, an overpowering, though austere, nature bursts beyond the bounds that permit disinterested contemplation.

Perhaps the sublime offers a clue for identifying a distinctive aesthetics of nature that is unconstrained by the traditional theory of the arts.<sup>12</sup> For here we need no longer pursue the hopeless effort to assimilate environmental appreciation to artistic satisfaction by objectifying and contemplating an object or scene of nature with a sense of disengagement, or by replacing the design of art with the order of nature. Why not reserve the disinterested contemplation of a discrete object for art and develop a different aesthetic for natural appreciation, one that acknowledges the experience of continuity, assimilation, and engagement that nature encourages? The sublime may provide the very direction we need.

Throughout the development of the notion of the sublime there persists the sense of boundless magnitude and power. In the first century A.D. Longinus identified it in literature as “the echo of greatness of spirit.”<sup>13</sup> Burke, in the mid-eighteenth century, associated the sublime in literature with the emotion of terror and its power over the imagination.<sup>14</sup> But it was Kant who discovered its applicability to nature, where the boundaries of form and purposiveness, through which the beautiful inheres in art, in some instances no longer impose restraint and control. While natural beauty is like art in the purposive order of its forms, this, Kant claimed, does not apply to the sublime. The sublime, in fact, is not in nature but in our mind, and it is only by means of the idea of reason, through the subjective construction of judgments, that we can establish the cognitive order of purposiveness. In what Kant called the mathematically sublime, where the magnitude of natural

things surpasses our aesthetic imagination, and in the dynamically sublime, in which the might of nature overwhelms us and produces fear, the aesthetic satisfaction we feel comes from our ability to grasp this, the first by our capacity to comprehend great size intellectually, the second by our contemplation of nature's power from a secure position, thus turning the initial pain into pleasure.<sup>15</sup> For Kant, then, both the fact of the sublime and its peculiar satisfaction are to be found in the mind through aesthetic experience and its cognitive comprehension. Once again the convenient Cartesianism of the Western tradition comes to the rescue, saving us from the terror of overwhelming magnitude and might in nature by the purposive order of thought.

That ploy is, however, no longer available. This is why nature will not stay within its prescribed limits but breaks out to engulf us. We can no longer, in ignorance of history and of experience, spin great webs of learning out of very little substance, as Francis Bacon once described the scholastic process, and contain the natural world within the constructions of the mind.<sup>16</sup> The safety sought in seeing ourselves separate from nature we now know to be specious. What, then, if we start by recognizing that connectedness? Here the sublime can serve not as an exceptional case but as a clear model for the aesthetic experience of nature. For it is through the very sense of magnitude and might Kant identified that we grasp the true proportions of the nature-human relation, where awe mixed with humility is the guiding sentiment. This is clearly a factor in the appeal that solitude has for desert hermit and arctic explorer alike: the intensity that goes with great simplicity and physical austerity, and the sense of harmony with nature that may accompany it.<sup>17</sup>

Yet one need not immerse oneself in an extreme environment to achieve that qualitative sense of unity. 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 in order to measure and judge it with complete objectivity. Nature exceeds the human mind. This is not just because of the limitations of our present knowledge, and it is not only because of the essentially anthropomorphic character of that knowledge, which prevents us from ever going beyond the character and boundaries of our cognitive process. The ultimate limitlessness of nature comes from recognizing that the cognitive relation with things is not the exclusive relation or even the highest one we can achieve. The proper response to nature in this sense is awe, not just from its magnitude and power, but from the mystery that, as in a work of art, is part of the essential poetry of the natural world. What is boundless, then, is the ultimately ungraspable breadth of nature. And terror is the appropriate response to a natural process that exceeds our power and confronts us, with overwhelming force, as the ultimate consequence of a scientific technology where humans have become the inescapable victims of their own actions.

Is aesthetic pleasure possible under these circumstances? Clearly not, if we think it necessary to exercise ultimate control by objectifying and contemplating



nature. But if the sublime becomes our model and we accept the unity of the natural world, then we must identify that qualitative character of our experience, which becomes central on those occasions when aesthetic appreciation dominates. They are times of sensory acuteness, of a perceptual unity of nature and human, of a congruity of awareness, understanding, and involvement mixed with awe and humility, in which the focus is on the immediacy and directness of the occasion of experience. Perceiving environment from within, as it were, looking not *at* it but being *in* it, nature becomes something quite different. It is transformed into a realm in which we live as participants, not observers.<sup>18</sup> The consequences are not de-aestheticization, a confounding of the aesthetic with the world of practical purposes and effects, as the eighteenth century would have it, but a condition that is intensely and inescapably aesthetic.

Nor need we look for occasions of a natural aesthetic only in the bold and dramatic places where Kant finds them: the ultimate immeasurableness of the universe, great gray cloud masses accompanied by crashes and flashes of thunder and lightning, a powerful hurricane, the moving mass of a mighty waterfall, the sight of the boundlessness or the overwhelming tumult of the ocean, the all-embracing vault of the starry heavens.<sup>19</sup> These are powerful occasions, to be sure, and Kant locates their sublimity with sensitivity, not in the intellectual comprehension of their processes and extent, but in the perceptual grasp of their force and range. One cannot distance oneself from such events; in fact, part of the aesthetic power of such occasions lies in our very vulnerability. Survival and safety clearly supersede the aesthetic dimension when actual danger threatens, but our personal involvement adds to the perceptual intensity of such situations. The lookout platform of a cathedral steeple or a skyscraper, a boardwalk beyond which storm waves are crashing on the shore, a hilltop during a lightning storm all enhance the qualitative intensity of aesthetic perception with a touch of fear.

But there are gentler occasions on which we engage the natural world: canoeing a serpentine river when the quiet evening water reflects the trees and rocks along the banks so vividly as to allure the paddler into the center of a six-dimensional world, three above and another three below; camping beneath pines black against the night sky; walking through the tall grass of a hidden meadow whose tree-defined edges become the boundaries of the earth. The aesthetic mark of all such times is not disinterested contemplation but total engagement, a sensory immersion in the natural world that reaches the still uncommon experience of unity. Joined with acute perceptual consciousness and enhanced by the felt understanding of assimilated knowledge, such occasions can become clear peaks in a cloudy world, high points in a life dulled by habit and defensive disregard.

It is not the sublime alone, then, that encourages an aesthetics of engagement; natural beauty can do so as well, once we are liberated from the formalistic requirements of discreteness and order. For unlike its representations, nature does not come framed, and we can take as much aesthetic delight in profusion and continuity as we have been taught to find in regularity and symmetry. The attraction

of a spreading patch of bunchberry or a stand of wild columbine on the forest floor does not lie in its stimulus to the free play of imagination alone, as Kant would have it, but on color, shape, poignant simplicity, delicacy and, as much as anything, its gratuitous extravagance.<sup>20</sup> Formal order is but one source of aesthetic satisfaction, not the *sine qua non* of beauty. Part of the appreciation of natural beauty lies in the fascination with intricate detail, subtle tone, endless variety, and the imaginative delight in what we would call, in a human artifact, marvelous invention, all these as part of an environmental setting with which we, as appreciative participants, are continuous. Forgoing the requirements of objectification and order, we can discover beauty in a rippling brook and a fire on the hearth, to cite Kant's examples, as much as in a van Ruysdael or a Hobbema painting of them.

### III.

Engagement, then, is the direction in which an aesthetics of nature can lead us. Yet adopting a participatory aesthetics transforms not only our appreciation of nature but the nature of our appreciation. For there is another alternative to the strategies of assimilating natural beauty to the arts or constructing separate accounts for each: The aesthetics of nature can serve as the model for appreciating art.

Continuity and perceptual immersion occur in our experience of art as much as in nature. Sculpture provides a clear instance of the adaptability of art to aesthetic engagement. While it appears to lend itself perfectly to traditional aesthetics, sculpture directly contradicts those conventions when it takes the form of earthworks and environments. Central to environmental art is the connection of the object with its site. In fact, functioning in important ways like seventeenth and eighteenth century English gardens, the appreciation of many earthworks and environmental art works rests on their ties with the perceiver through the meanings and associations that they evoke, as well as in the sensory bonds with site and viewer that they extend. These connections are as much a part of art as of nature. Moreover, neither site nor perceiver has sharp boundaries; each combines with the other into a single inclusive experience.<sup>21</sup>

In a similar way, both art and nature may exhibit some degree of order. Associating design with art mistakenly generalizes from a common but not universal formal order, since design is but a genetic explanation of the order that may be found in art. Moreover, one is not even obliged to take the essentially Kantian tack of finding order in nature to qualify it for aesthetic appreciation. While there is formal structure in a quartz crystal and a starfish, as there is in the symmetry of the Taj Mahal and Notre Dame Cathedral, art, like nature, has its share of deliberate disarray. We can find as much disorder in the opening movements of Bach's great organ Toccatas in C major and D minor and in Debussy's through-composed songs as in the irregular curve of a beach or the scattering of daisies in a field.

What draws together natural beauty and the arts are some commonalties in our relation and response: both can be experienced perceptually and both can be

appreciated aesthetically. And more particularly still, both can function reciprocally with the appreciator, enticing the participant to join in a unified perceptual situation. Such appreciation requires a radically different aesthetic from eighteenth century disinterestedness. This is an aesthetics of engagement, and it is one that environmental appreciation especially encourages.<sup>22</sup> Applying this model of aesthetic engagement to art appreciation leads to restructuring the usual approach to art. It also suggests ways of resolving problems that result from adopting separate forms of appreciation for nature and for art.

A related issue has to do with appreciating the beauty of the beloved. This may be seen as an aspect of natural beauty that attaches to the human person, and it usually harbors an element of sexual desire, sometimes diffuse, sometimes specific.<sup>23</sup> Appreciation here is hardly disinterested, and the tradition in aesthetics has always had difficulty accommodating itself to this sense of beauty since, as Plato observed in the *Hippias Major*, sexual desire is not confined to the distance receptors of sight and hearing. Need we then, like Plato, be obliged to drop any claim to beauty here? Obviously yes, if we are committed to an aesthetics of disinterested contemplation; no, if we accept an aesthetics of engagement.

For the beauty of the sexually beloved does not lie in possession, itself never an intrinsic value. Neither does it lie in arousal, which is self-directed, nor in idealization, which rests on objectification. To appreciate such beauty for its own sake rests on recognizing its primarily inherent value, a value that dwells in the sensuous and other perceptual qualities of the situation and not on disinterestedness. Engagement recognizes the possibility of this aesthetic response.<sup>24</sup> Like most human values, sexuality need not be either entirely biological or sublimated into something ideal. Appreciating the beauty of the beloved in desire is fulfilled in the quality of an entire human situation enhanced by mutual contribution. This is precisely what an engaged aesthetic honors.

Again, can nature reveal the transcendent as art is capable of doing? As with sensual beauty, we can easily be seduced away from the aesthetic character of the situation: in the one case by indulging in the appeal of gratification, in the other, by abandoning ourselves entirely to some surpassing state. To reach the supersensible through communion with nature, as with art, risks forgoing the aesthetic in experience in favor of mystical transcendence. Whatever the attraction of the transcendent, it raises the danger of turning art or nature into a mere vehicle for achieving such a state. And this would abandon the intrinsic character of the aesthetic and the continuing presence of nature or art as a necessary constituent of the appreciative situation.

Yet there is something here that nature shares with art, which poets like Wordsworth recognize. There may be an easy transition from beauty to the sublime, though I suspect that both "beauty" and "sublime" require radical redefinition once one no longer associates the first with objects and the second with transcendence. Perhaps the truth approached by transcendence lies in the quality of unity with nature that aesthetic engagement encourages. The perceived sense of

continuity of our human being with the dynamic forms and processes of the natural world is a central factor in the aesthetic appreciation of nature, and it accounts for a touch of the sublime in the feeling of awe that accompanies the occasion. Transcendent no longer, the quality of numinousness persists in the sense of immanence we sometimes obtain in nature and art, and which is the fulfillment of aesthetic engagement.

What we grasp in the wilder states of nature we appreciate too in its more cultivated forms. Those environments where art and nature are deliberately fused, such as gardens, are one way a natural aesthetic is employed to evoke the sense of continuity with nature. Cultural forms and traditions mediate that unity here, as they mediate every mode of experience. There is a world of difference between a Japanese garden and a French one, a telling indication of the different worlds those cultures create. While this union of art and nature was deliberately cultivated during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the impulse to fuse them persists, and not only in modern environmental sculpture. The same fusion of art and nature occurs in modern architecture that is sensitive to its site, in urban planning that responds to geomorphological and geographical considerations, in site-specific sculpture, and in the design of urban parks. A single aesthetic applies to nature and to art because, in the final analysis, they are both cultural constructs, and so we are not talking about two things but about one.

An aesthetics of engagement thus encompasses both art and nature, and it does what we hope any good account will do—solve more problems than it creates. Moreover, aesthetic engagement offers more than a theoretical advantage; it opens regions of experience that have been closed to aesthetic appreciation by theories that have survived through exclusion. By extending appreciation to nature in all its cultural manifestations, the entire sensible world is included within the purview of aesthetics. This hardly makes the world more beautiful; if anything it confronts us with the failures of taste and judgment that have marked most industrial and commercial activities in this century. But if environment, which is nature as we live it, can have aesthetic value, so then can actions be condemned that ignore or deny that value. A universal aesthetic is therefore an aesthetic of the universe, and it offers us a goal to work for as well as a standard by which to judge our success.

### Notes

- 1 See T.J. Diffey, "Natural Beauty without Metaphysics," Allen Carlson, "Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature," and Stephanie Ross, "Gardens, Earthworks, and Environmental Art," in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). The original version of this essay was written as a response to essays in that volume.
- 2 Diffey, "Natural Beauty without Metaphysics" and Yi-Fu Tuan, "Desert and Ice: Ambivalent Aesthetics," in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*.

- 3 See my essays, "The Historicity of Aesthetics I" and "The Historicity of Aesthetics II," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 26 (1986): 101-111 and 195-203.
- 4 See my *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), Chapter 3.
- 5 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* [1711], cited in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, ed. A. Hofstadter and R. Kuhns (New York: Modern Library, 1964), pp. 246-7.
- 6 I argue against the objectification premise in "Art without Object," in *Creation and Interpretation*, ed. Stern, Rodman, and Cobitz (New York: Haven, 1985), pp. 63-72.
- 7 This is the tack that Carlson takes; see "Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature." [Editors' Note: See also Allen Carlson, "Appreciation and the Natural Environment," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 37 (1979): 267-276 [reprinted in this volume, Chapter 2].]
- 8 This question implicates the large phenomenological literature on the lifeworld, raising issues that can only be broached here. One, of surpassing importance, is whether the lifeworld is itself a historico-cultural construct, and whether the arts of the past hundred years are fulfilling a function the arts have often had of serving as the vanguard of cultural change, a change in this case from a lifeworld of discrete objects to one of essential connections and continuities.
- 9 In *Art and Engagement*, especially in Chapters 1 and 2, I claim that the traditional theory never really gave a satisfactory account of the actual workings of the arts and that it owes its influence to its compatibility with the classic philosophic tradition rather than to its theoretical success in explaining the arts.
- 10 See Ross, "Gardens, Earthworks, and Environmental Art."
- 11 In Chapter 1 of my *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) I discuss various meanings and offer a redefinition of nature. Our understanding of nature, wilderness, forest, and landscape has changed dramatically over time. See, for example, Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London: Allen Lane, 1983); Marvin W. Mikesell, "Landscape," in *Man, Space, and Environment*, ed. P.W. English and R.C. Mayfield (New York: Oxford, 1972), pp. 9-15; David Lowenthal, "Is Wilderness 'Paradise Now'? Images of Nature in America," *Columbia University Forum* (1964), pp. 34-40; Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974).
- 12 References here to traditional aesthetics are not meant to overlook the variety of different theories that have been proposed in the past. My claim is that they do nonetheless possess certain generic features, whether they rely for their identity on imitation, emotion, expression, symbol, or language. See my *Art and Engagement*, Chapter 1. In *The Theory of the Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), Francis Sparshott relates the various theories differently, deriving all later developments from what he calls "the classic line." See also my earlier book, *The Aesthetic Field* (Springfield, IL: C.C. Thomas, 1970), Chapter 1, "Surrogate Theories of Art."
- 13 Longinus, *On the Sublime* [1st Century, AD], ed. D.A. Russell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).
- 14 Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime*

- and Beautiful* [1757], in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- 15 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, [1790], trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), Sections 23-30.
  - 16 Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, First Book [1605], in *Essays, Advancement of Learning, New Atlantis, and Other Pieces*, ed. R.F. Jones (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1937), p. 202.
  - 17 See Tuan, "Desert and Ice: Ambivalent Aesthetics."
  - 18 I can only mention this here, not make a case for it. I have undertaken that in *Art and Engagement*, Chapters 3 and 4.
  - 19 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Sections 26, 28, and 29.
  - 20 See Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Section 22.
  - 21 In Chapters 5 and 6 of *Art and Engagement* I show how aesthetic engagement can illuminate the appreciation of traditional sculpture.
  - 22 This is not a developed case for extending the model of environmental appreciation to the arts. In Chapter 10 of *The Aesthetics of Environment* I undertook to do that.
  - 23 See Diffey, "Natural Beauty without Metaphysics." "Natural" beauty here, as elsewhere, is a misnomer. Like all forms of nature, human beauty is very much a human, cultural construct, not just by techniques of physical enhancement, but in the selection of desirable body types, physiognomies, personalities, behavior patterns, and the like.
  - 24 See my "The Sensuous and the Sensual in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 23 (1964): 185-192, reprinted in *Philosophical Essays on Curriculum*, ed. R.S. Guttchen and B. Bandman, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1969), pp. 306-317.