

NATURE,
ARTFORMS,
AND THE
WORLD
AROUND US

*An Introduction to
the Regions of
Aesthetic Experience*

ROBERT E. WOOD



Nature, Artforms, and the World Around Us

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An Introduction to the Regions of Aesthetic
Experience

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*To all my students,
past, present, and to come.*

PREFACE

The philosopher has his eyes fixed on the whole...and the whole character of each within the Whole.

Plato, *Theaetetus*

The True is the Whole.

G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*

This work is a sequel to *Placing Aesthetics*,¹ which “placed” aesthetics, or reflection on the phenomena of Art and Nature which we have come to call “aesthetic,” in a threefold manner. It placed it within the structures of the field of experience by locating it in relation to “the heart” producing and responding to “charged presences.” It placed it in the history of selected high points of philosophic reflection from Plato to Heidegger. Finally, it placed it within the overall conceptual scheme of each thinker. It began with a sketch of the phenomenological field for the arts.²

The current work develops in the direction indicated in that sketch. It aims at a sense of *aesthetic regionality*, the entire aesthetic region with the affinities and differences the region of each art form shows. Each of the

¹*Placing Aesthetics: Reflections on the Philosophic Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999) (henceforth PA).

²See the chart in the Introduction to the current work.

art forms appears in the niches of human life determined by three parameters—sensory base, spatio-temporal relations, and language—: as spatial arts appearing to seeing, temporal arts appearing to hearing, spatio-temporal arts to seeing and hearing, with linguistic arts operating in differing media.³

This text was developed in a course based on *Placing Aesthetics* which provided the context for reading classic philosophical texts on matters aesthetic.⁴ The current text had its origin in the treatment of a particular art form at the end of each course. This eventually enabled me to bring them together into the current text which now plays counterpart to my treatment of the differing philosophers from Plato to Heidegger. It is intended for upper-level courses on art and aesthetics. But the style of writing I have used should appeal also to educated individuals interested in matters aesthetic.

Following Plato's claim that the philosopher always has his eyes fixed on the Whole and the whole nature of each kind within the Whole, and following the direction Hegel gave to the system of the arts, the current work applies a descriptive method to delimit the spaces—the “regional ontologies,” to employ Husserl's term—within which each of the several major art forms make their appearance. In a sense I have tried to do too much. But in the contemporary climate of opinion, the attempt is necessary to get and keep in mind the entire regionality of the aesthetic, however sketchily. Philosophical discussions tend either to go into the ethereal or descend to complex particulars without first securing a comprehensive view of the eidetic features of each region within which discussion—and in this case, discussion of the arts—takes place. In the current situation, the tendency is to focus on particular aspects of a given art form or to deconstruct whatever holistic claims have been made. The result is the atrophy of any sense of the Whole. This work is directed at the first steps in regaining such a sense.

One has to go back to the unglamorous task of a careful preliminary description of the humble features of each art form to make sure one has identified all the relevant features of the space within which it appears.⁵

³We will discuss this further in our Introduction.

⁴*Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, edited by A. Hofstadter and R. Kuhn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) provides a large segment of text from each thinker.

⁵In “Phenomenology of the Mailbox,” I carry out that unglamorous task in showing the intelligible strands present in the field of our “operative intentionality.” See *Philosophy Today*, Summer, 2003.

The reader is asked to attend carefully to these features to make sure the entire round has been covered and, in the process, practice getting a sense of the whole region in each case within the encompassing regional-ity of the aesthetic. I have also given a historical perspective on each art form by assimilating remarks of leading artists as well as writers on art, philosophical and art-historical, in the history of the West. This text gives experiential grounding that should lead back to the thinkers introduced in *Placing Aesthetics* to establish an ongoing dialogue.

The current book is also connected with *Placing Aesthetics* insofar as the thinkers involved in the latter hover over the text as dialogical partners. Plato's Beauty Itself and its erotic correlate, Hegel's system of the arts, Dewey's rootedness in nature, Heidegger's lived relation to the Whole playing in tandem with rootedness in the Earth,⁶ and Buber's dialogic existence are the central figures.⁷

In each of the art forms we can see how different thinkers come at the same phenomena and are able to enrich our approaches to them. As Nietzsche advised, it is necessary to have 1000 eyes to do justice to what is the case. The present work is consequently not a treatise but a dialogue. However, dialogue presupposes an ontological structure on the part of each partner and on the part of the regions one will be dealing with in the art forms to be investigated. Hence, as starting points, we will lay out the eidetic structures involved: the fundamental character of the human being and the regional ontologies of the various art forms.

Originally we followed Hegel's scheme of the classic art forms. But, taking up the recent turn back to an aesthetics of Nature, we have inserted a chapter on Nature and on Landscaping before the treatment of the classic art forms.⁸ Film is also added to the list as the contemporary *Gesamtkunst*. Further, following the more recent turn to the

⁶For a comparison of Dewey and Heidegger that yields remarkable overlap on several crucial themes, see my "Aesthetics: The Complementarity of, and Difference between Dewey and Heidegger," *John Dewey*, D. Anderson and J. McDermott eds, Special Issue of the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 87, no. 2. Spring, 2013.

⁷I did not include Martin Buber in *Placing Aesthetics*, but I did produce my first book on his thought and he has remained in the background of my thought: *Martin Buber's Ontology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

⁸See for example the collected essays in Allen Carlson and Arnold Berneat eds, *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004) (henceforth ANE) and Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott eds, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) (henceforth NAE).

aesthetics of everyday life, a final chapter pays attention also to that turn.⁹ We add as an Appendix Kierkegaard's presentation of the aesthetic life to situate the aesthetic project within the larger framework of human life.

Three of these discussions have already appeared in print and we wish to acknowledge the sources. The architecture chapter appeared as "Architecture: The Confluence of Art, Technology, Politics, and Nature," in *On Technology*, Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 1995/1996. The chapter on film appeared in a less developed form as "Toward an Ontology of Film," in *Film-Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 24 (August, 2001). The chapter on landscaping appeared as "Martin Heidegger and Environmental Aesthetics: Towards a Philosophy of Domestic Landscaping" in *Current Studies in Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, vol 1, no. 1 (Winter, 2001) (online journal).

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⁹See Andrew Light and Jonathan Smith eds, *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) (henceforth AEL).

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Introduction

The basic claim of my previous work is that there is a “human nature,” the enduring structure of which compels the creation of culture which is essentially plural and thus historical. The grounds for this lie in the magnetically bipolar character of that nature.¹ We are most obviously organisms which are public objects of observation, but we also each experience ourselves privately “from within” in terms of our own “lived bodies” and our pre-reflectively conscious self-relation. Our organisms as organ-systems not only process and organ-ize materials drawn from the environment, they also create and sustain organs for sensory experience. Such experience occurs out of a single center of awareness underpinned by a psycho-neural system which spontaneously retains and synthesizes what is presented through the various sense organs. Such synthesis awakens appetite and the perceiving subject is thereby magnetized by objects appearing “outside,” furnishing opportunities and threats to the well-being of organic existence, the whole point of sensory experience for an animal nature. In fact, our original access to things is through the apprehension of functioning wholes in relation to our needs, on account of which perception is, from the very beginning, value-laden.

¹For a more detailed exposition, see the Introduction to my *Placing Aesthetics* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1999).

The organic center of “information processing” is the brain. But it is crucial to underscore that the display of the objects does not take place *in* the brain—in spite of the claims of scientists and their popularizers to the contrary—but rather *between* the awareness arising out of the organism-directing brain and the objects “outside” the observing-desiring organism in the environment. Awareness is focused precisely *outside* as a primal datum that grounds both everyday awareness and scientific inquiry.² The perceptual synthesis itself functions in terms of the desires that the attractive or repelling objects evoke. Thus the initial sensory “showing” of objects in the environment is not theoretical but practical and not biologically affect neutral but affect laden.³ This sensory level furnishes but one pole—and that the most obvious—of the bipolar structure of humanness. It is the field wherein the arts arise.

The other pole—not at all obvious—is empty reference to the totality. Beyond the visual horizon, there is the mental horizon within which the sensory object appears. It involves a peculiar relation to absolutely everything. As empty, this relation provokes the most fundamental question, the question that follows from the basic structure of humanness: what is the place of humans in the whole scheme of things? And, what *is* the whole scheme of things? Growing up, each of us at first encounters such questions only indirectly in terms of the answers already given to it by the religious or philosophic tradition in which we have been raised. Religious proclamation provides a putative answer to the questions; philosophy in its speculative form attempts to ground its answers in evidence.

The ultimate basis for the question lies in *the notion of Being*. Being is a notion that includes everything in its scope: it covers the totality of what is. What anything we encounter *is* is not only what the immediate evidence displays of it, but everything that further investigation will uncover, and even, possibly, what empirical investigation will never be able to uncover. Yet whatever we have evidence of is linked through the notion of Being to whatever we do not yet or cannot have evidence of.

²See my “What Is Seeing? A Phenomenological Approach to Neuro-Psychology,” *Science, Reason, and Religion*, Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, vol. 85 (2011), 121–34.

³Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and the Non-Formal Ethics of Value*, M. Frings trans. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 139.

Even the question of a possible Infinite Being is included within the scope of the notion of Being. To begin with, we have evidence of what our senses reveal, along with our awareness itself; together with that, everything else is contained within the notion of Being as an encompassing darkness within the “island of light” that is the sense world. That light is filtered off from the fullness of things encountered, initially in view of the service of the sensory field to biological need. Our reference to the totality beyond the sensory field is initially empty. But the notion of Being places us at a certain “interior distance” from our sensory experience, grounding two necessities of our nature: understanding and choice.⁴

As to the first, directed toward the Whole, we are condemned to attempt an understanding of our experience in terms of the absolute totality of things. Understanding consists in relating a given individual to like individuals, and in relating that likeness to other related likenesses. At the most rudimentary level, we understand the color of the letters on this page as *black*. What we see are individual letters present to our capacity to see linked together under the general heading of “black.” The latter, in turn, is linked to white, red, and so on, under the more generic heading of “color,” which, unlike the concepts of white and red, etc., has no sensory correlate. Color, in turn, is understood in terms of its relation to other features gathered together in the notion of “sensory features” which, along with peculiarities of behavior and the like, is an attribute, a dependent aspect of bodies. All of this falls within the overarching notion of Being as its articulation: this *is* black, etc.

But such focal objects are correlated with the mental acts that attend to them. The sensory features are correlated with sensory acts which themselves are not sensory objects and which are the flip side of sensory desires. We do not see seeing or sensory desires: both the seeing and the desiring are directed towards individual sensory objects which are the focus of attention, although we are immediately, unreflectively aware that we see and desire those things. Self-presence is ingredient in awareness of what is other—in fact, self-presence is the basis for the manifestation

⁴See Martin Buber, “Distance and Relation,” *The Knowledge of Man*, M. Friedman ed. and trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 59–71.

of what is *other than* that self-presence. Such self-presence is a matter of feeling which is modulated in terms of desire, pleasure, and pain.

The general notions in terms of which we *understand* the sensory are correlated with acts that we have come to call “intellectual.” Understanding involves seeing the individual as an instance of a universal type which can be unpacked in terms of a set of interrelated types, as in the descriptive hierarchy involved in the recognition of color presented above. Sensory acts reveal actual individual aspects of actual individual things; intellectual acts reveal universal aspects that are potentially applicable to an indefinite number of particular instances. Intellectual acts, focused through sensory experience, fill in the initially empty space of meaning between the full actuality of the sensory field and the initially empty totality. As we advance in understanding the correlation between our capacities and the things revealed through these capacities, we widen our opportunities for choice. Choice, in turn, has the same grounding as intellection.

Placed at an absolute distance from our sensory experience by reference to the Whole, we are condemned to choose among the possibilities revealed through our understanding because we are always referred beyond them and thus given over to ourselves. There are several limitations here: the narrowness or even falsity of our understanding, the limitation of our individual capacities to act out what we choose, and our limited understanding of the motivational structure which leads us to choose one way rather than another. The latter can be progressively purified by giving ourselves over unrestrictedly to the twin desires to know what is the case and to respond to the obligatory, that is, to commit ourselves to the True and the Good.

Not only does each of us settle into regular ways of understanding and choosing, we also pass on to others these regularities that coalesce into a tradition, as we ourselves have been shaped by the regularities of others. Human nature, by reason of its peculiar bipolar structure, is culture-creating and culture-sustaining. We are animals shaped by tradition and we, in turn, shape tradition; but in any case, we are inseparable from it. We are by nature what Aristotle called *zoion politikon*, the being that lives in the *polis*, that is, that lives out of the sedimented result of the choices and understandings of those long dead in the institutional forms within which we carry on our lives.

This tradition-bound character is most evident at the level of that most fundamental of institutions, language. We do not give ourselves

language but enter into the language provided by others. Language sets us into a space of common meanings; it brings us out of the privacy of our desires and experiences; it shapes our desires and experiences communally. Language is the privileged locus of the interplay between private and public. It articulates our common practices within the overarching view of the Whole traditionally provided by religion. It transforms the sensory into a sign of the universal. Thought thus requires a double imbedding: in a sensory linguistic vehicle and in an antecedent tradition.

So, by nature we are a genetically stamped reference to totality. By that reference we are granted what we have come to call “intellect” and “will.” The possibilities afforded by our bipolar structure are focused in terms of the further stamping provided by culture, both in terms of upbringing and in terms of the continuing impact of the cultural surround. But with the awakening of reflective intelligence, each of us has come to make our own choices and establish our own routines as variations on the genetic and cultural themes. So we have a three-fold sedimentation—genetic, cultural, and personal-historical—which constitutes for each one of us our current “Me.” This Me provides the set of concrete possibilities arising out of our past from which “I” at any given moment have to choose. “I” as reference to totality am by nature—insofar as I am capable of reflective assessment—always prised loose and set at a reflective distance, not only from what is presented outside me, but also from Me. But I am ever spontaneously inclined to choose along the lines that have settled into the center of Me, into what a long tradition has called *the heart*.⁵ It sets up a kind of magnetic field of attractions and repulsions peculiar to each individual. It provides the default mode for our spontaneous lines of action. Correlate to the heart are “significant presences,” providing spontaneous solicitations by persons, situations, and practices “dear to my heart” that step out of the indifference of a merely theoretical presentation and take hold of me.

I have spoken of human structure as bipolar. I am quite aware of the ordinary understanding of the term “bipolar”: it describes a dysfunctional

⁵See my Introduction and the work of Stephan Strasser, *Phenomenology of Feeling: An Essay on the Phenomena of the Heart*, R. Wood, trans. Foreword to this translation is by Paul Ricoeur (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1977).

mental condition of alternating swings between exaltation and depression. It is this meaning that I want to preserve as a kind of subtext. Our nature is constructed around a biological pole and an ontological pole, and it is precisely the tensive character of this structure that grounds the underlying *Angst* brought to the fore by Heidegger and by Augustine in his notion of “the restless heart.” Orientation toward the Whole of what is, based upon the all-encompassing but initially empty notion of Being, blows the lid off of the security of the animal directed by its appetites. We are condemned to choose how to relate to our appetitive solicitations and how to create a meaningful whole out of potential appetitive chaos while coming to terms with how we stand in relation to our background orientation to the Whole. As Nietzsche would have it, there is the basic imperative: “Condemn the chaos that is within to take on form.”⁶

My basic contention concerning aesthetics is that the heart is the locus of aesthetic experience. It is always colored by the way I understand the character of the Totality insofar as that understanding has percolated down into my heart. Works of art articulate the desires of the heart, address the heart by establishing charged presences appearing within the sensory field, but setting them within the meaningfulness of the Whole. Works and experiences are “deep” insofar as they make explicit our belonging to the Whole, relatively superficial insofar as they ignore that and appeal to the lower aspects of human experience, as in kitsch and, at the bottom, in pornography. In some cases the art form may issue a demand, as Rilke claimed: “You must change your life.”⁷ Besides aesthetic satisfaction, works of art may occasion transformation.

Though I have dealt with contemporary artists like Andy Goldsworthy and Christo, I have not dealt at all with the formless junk that has made its way into our museums.⁸ There are theories advanced

⁶ *Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), §915/483 (henceforth WTP).

⁷ Rainer Marie Rilke, “On an Ancient Torso of Apollo.” See Appendix to the chapter on sculpture.

⁸ At the Nasher sculpture museum in Dallas, I saw a bent-up old car bumper and also ten or so very large wooden boxes propped up on one end, sitting on rumpled canvas with paint and various colors splashed randomly about the exhibit. At the art museum in Stuttgart, I saw a piece consisting of small heaps of plaster on a large wrinkled canvas with two long planks crossing at the top.

for including such items, but I appeal to a developed sense of *form* requiring a high level of mastery of technique as the entry ticket into the spaces that deserve our attention.

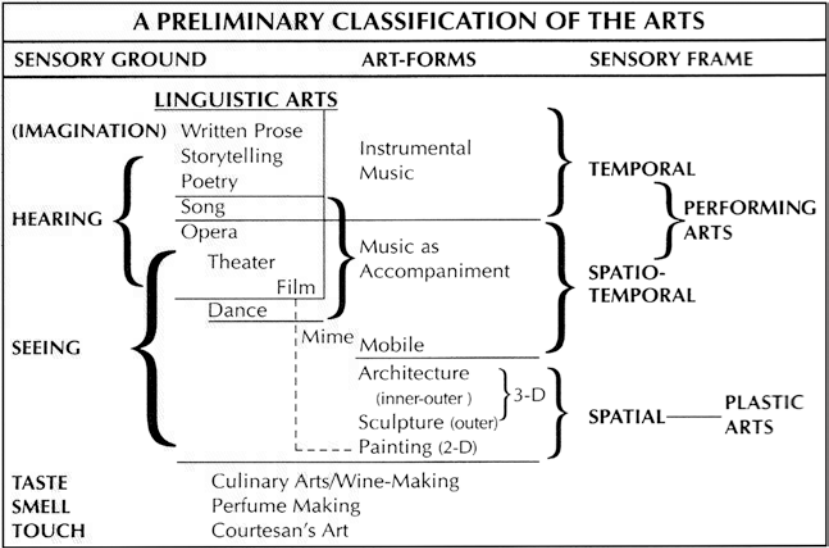
Hegel speaks of our everyday relations to things as constituting a “hard shell” of appearance that cloaks the real nature of things.⁹ One recognizes ordinary objects realistically portrayed and responds to them in terms of the associations they evoke in everyday life. But “everyday life” presents us with a kind of “dashboard knowledge” of what to push, turn, and pull on the sensory surface in order to get the output we desire. This is true at the level of the sensory field as such, the initial and enduring function of which, we said, is to manifest opportunities and threats to our organic well-being. It is true also at the level of social co-existence into which we are introduced through language and all the stereotypical ways of identifying and responding that constitutes the web of belief and practice peculiar to one’s own ethnic community. That cultural web determines the selective focus we give to the initial and enduring sensory given by determining our modes of evaluation. We learn to glance, categorize, and respond in set ways, without attending carefully to how things are actually articulated in detail, much less to what might underlie their surface presentation.

In my first sculpture course, the first assignment was to produce a mask of a human face. My first attempt showed bulging eyes. When I began to look carefully at faces, I was astonished to find how deep-set the eyes typically are and how I had completely overlooked this feature. And as I studied the human face, I began to realize how stereotypical our ordinary attention is. As Heidegger underscored, we are thrown into a pre-articulated cultural world not of our own choosing and are dispositionally tuned to respond in terms of “average everydayness.”¹⁰ This provides a culturally mediated “dashboard knowledge” that takes up the biologically natural dashboard. The task of the arts is to use sensory surface to refocus attention and/or to communicate what lies beyond the surface.

⁹G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, T. Knox, trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press), I, 9 (henceforth LFA).

¹⁰*Being and Time*, J. Stambaugh trans. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 338–40/German 370–2.

Consider the following chart which lays out the field for the basic art forms.¹¹



There are three basic parameters of the field of experience: the sensory base, the spatio-temporal frame, and linguistic mediation. John Dewey warned against isolating art forms in these conceptual bins; his warning is well taken.¹² Each art form has its origin in the relation of the living creature to its environment as a holistically rhythmic being in relation to a rhythmic environment. Holistic functioning involves a fund of retained experiences integrated around focal objects.¹³ Visual, tactual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, appetitive, and kinesthetic components enter integrally into such experience. So, although each sense might take the lead in a given art form, all the other aspects underpin and direct experience within that medium. The common substance of all the arts lies in this

¹¹This first appeared in my *Placing Aesthetics*, and is reprinted here with permission.
¹²John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn, 1934), 125–6, 175 (henceforth AE).
¹³See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, D. Landes trans. (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 241–2.

experiential substratum. Hence every art form can be called “poetic, architectural, dramatic, sculptural, pictorial, literary.”¹⁴ Dewey’s thought provides an extended basis for Aristotle’s calling attention to our natural delight in rhythm and harmony without exploring that as far as Dewey does.¹⁵ Dewey’s thought also adds descriptive richness to complement Heidegger’s notion of Earth.¹⁶

Keeping this in mind, our division provides the basis for distinguishing and relating art forms in terms of how each of their eidetic features, the universal characteristics limning each art form, are related to those parameters. This yielded *the spatial art forms* of architecture, sculpture, and painting which appeal to seeing; *the spatio-temporal art forms* of theater, opera, and film that appeal to seeing and hearing, as well as mime and mobile sculpture which appeal to seeing alone in terms of the temporal presentation of spatially extended things; and *the temporal art forms* of dance, music, song, poetry, and story-telling which appeal primarily to hearing, but, in the case of dance, also to seeing. Written prose involves what is involved in attention to any art form: the constructive response of the imagination building the world of the text by following the words on the page or divining the meaning carried by a painting, a musical piece or a sculpted object. Written prose, along with story-telling, poetry, song, theater, opera, and film are also *linguistic arts*.

As I said, in this work I will focus attention upon seven basic art forms: landscaping, architecture, sculpture, painting, music, literature, and film. This focus follows the classic division developed by Hegel, with the notable exceptions of film, the most recent major art form, and landscaping. The treatment of landscaping follows the first chapter on nature aesthetics, for landscaping brings nature into culture, placing it in proximity to architecture. Such division will allow us to include comparative discussion of the art forms not included on Hegel’s list.

However, as I said, I have not begun the main body of this work with art forms but with the framework, part external, part internal, within which they all appear and from which they derive many of their forms:

¹⁴AE, 229.

¹⁵*Poetics*, 1448b7.

¹⁶“Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” (henceforth BDT) *Poetry, Language, and Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1971), 148–51 (henceforth PLT).

that of the presentation of Nature. As we have also said, the aesthetics of the natural environment has recently undergone a substantial revival, upon which we will draw in the first chapter. There has also been a more recent move in the direction of exploring the aesthetics of the everyday world or the built environment. Our last chapter will deal with that aspect of aesthetics. So the treatment of art forms will be flanked by the treatment of nature on the one hand and the everyday world on the other as enduring matrices for the art forms.

Finally, we have added an epilogue on Kierkegaard's presentation of the aesthetic life, that is, a life whose fundamental principle is self-enjoyment, crude or refined. Kierkegaard argues that such a life should be bounded by ethical and religious commitment. He keeps alive that relation to the Whole we have been and will be underscoring throughout.

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The Aesthetics of Nature

We can approach Nature in several different ways, beginning with natural science. In recent times, alongside the scientists there have been the great naturalists: in nineteenth-century America Ralph Waldo Emerson¹ and Henry David Thoreau² appreciatively lived in, thought, and wrote about the natural world. In the twentieth century, there was John Muir who spent most of his time in the wild, plodding through forests and scaling mountains, and writing about it in such a way as to persuade Theodore Roosevelt to set aside various natural parks to protect them from exploitation by businesses and by homesteaders.³ Later there was Aldo Leopold, author of *Sand County Almanac*. Leopold, an exemplary fusion of naturalist and scientist each informing the other,⁴ is a perfect example of the importance for biologists of becoming naturalists. Since biologists, and thus also medical students, deal mostly with parts of dead animals or human cadavers or live creatures under unnatural conditions within the discipline of *bio-logy*, a discipline given to the understanding

¹Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," *Nature and Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin, 1982).

²Henry David Thoreau, *Walden or Life in the Woods* (New York: Doubleday, n.d.).

³See James Mitchell Clark, *The Life and Adventures of John Muir* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1980).

⁴*Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949).



Fig. 2.1 David Wood, *Swirling waters*

of life, they should learn to attend to natural things as they *live* and behave in their native habitats (Fig. 2.1).⁵

Those who write on aesthetics have most recently expanded the scope of their considerations from art forms to the natural environment. The movement had its origin in Ronald Hepburn’s 1966 “Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty,”⁶ and in this volume we shall consider works that have appeared since then. But I want to begin with reflections upon our place as human beings in Nature.

⁵See Leon Kass, *Toward a More Natural Science* (New York: Free Press, 1988).

⁶Ronald Hepburn (1966), “Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty,” eds. Allen Carlson, and Arnold Berneise, *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*. (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004), 43–62. (henceforth ANE.) The work within which it now appears contains a significant bibliography in the notes to the introductory essay, 27–42.

Before there were human beings, there was Nature. Then human beings came on the scene, having, just like other animals, the kind of organs that allow the manifestation of the environment within the limited thresholds set up by the perceptual organs and in the service of biological need. This appearance, however, is only a relatively superficial show, hiding the vast complexity and hidden powers that lie beneath the sensory surface; getting to know more and more of these can lead to the expansion of our aesthetic sensibility.

Animals are monopolar in their awareness, whereas humans are, like a magnet, bipolar. As we have already noted, in the human case, sensory experience occurs in a field of consciousness that is oriented towards the Whole of what is. Such orientation pries each of us loose from immersion in the environment and gives each of us over to ourselves to understand ourselves and the world in which we live and take responsibility for our actions. This situation produces a constant tension between the two poles. Within that tension culture is constituted and human beings live their peculiar lives. There is thus a dialectic, a reciprocal conditioning, not only between Nature and culture, but also between culture and the freely self-disposing individuals living within it. The latter are inevitably the carriers of the culture, but can also contribute creatively to it or lead to its degeneration. One form of degeneration is the lack of reverence for the Nature from which we have emerged and in which we remain rooted that leads us to consider it only as material for our projects.⁷

Early humans not only strove to maintain themselves in relation to the manifest environment, they also learned to transform that environment by abstracting the notions of things from their individual instances and re-arranging things to suit human purposes. But this was only an extension of the coping intelligence of high-order primates. Distinctive humanness involves some conception of the hidden Whole behind the sensory surface. This adds depth to the essential and literal “superficiality,” that is, surface character, of animal awareness. Human aesthetic

⁷See Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, W. Lovitt, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). For an approach to his “aesthetics” within the larger framework of his work in general, see the chapter on Heidegger in my *Placing Aesthetics: Reflections on the Philosophic Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999). So also for the other major thinkers cited.

appreciation brings more than sensory awareness to what is presented sensorily.⁸

This does not preclude acute sensitivity on the part of the animal to the nuances of what appears in the environment relevant to animal survival. But all of that takes place within the display of a kind of dashboard, a surface that animals, driven by biological need, learn to manipulate in order to get the desired output, while being completely unaware that there is anything beyond that surface or “under the hood.”⁹ We might express their situation metaphorically: they live wholly within the luminous bubble blown by the nervous system.

Emptily aware of the wholeness beyond the sensory dashboard and of the encompassing Whole that is the cosmos, humans produced mythic cosmologies centered upon notions of the gods who were linked with the origins of things. And in addition, they learned to step back from coping in order to appreciate the display of things with which they felt as one. They further learned to transform the surface and to play with harmonious forms, decorating their bodies and their implements, and transforming the sounds they made through the discovery and production of diachronic and eventually also synchronic harmonies. The emergence of music from the cacophony of sounds generated in the environment involved the “lived” discovery of *the harmonic series* which, in the West, was eventually thematized and used as the basis for the development of the harpsichord, the organ, and the piano.

Music may have had its rhythmic origin in a mother rocking her child and humming softly to it; or it may have been associated with the regularity involved in chipping stone, paddling a canoe, or working together to haul heavy objects. Melody may have arisen in the attempt to imitate birdsong. Early drawings of the prey or the totem of a tribe may have had magical implications. Early art forms included tattooing, utensil design, ornamentation (headdresses, necklaces, bracelets and the like), decorative clothing and rugs, and visually rhythmic elaboration of weapons and vehicles of conveyance. Much of the art centered upon the decoration of temples and the huts of chieftains in order to underscore the

⁸For the ways in which metaphysical sensibility transcends sensory presence in and through sensory presence, see Ronald Hepburn’s “Landscape and Metaphysical Imagination,” ANE, 127–40.

⁹The felicitous metaphor of “dashboard knowledge” comes from Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: An Essay in Idolatry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, n.d.), 55–6.

importance of what took place within them. In any case, art arose out of an interchange between the organically situated human being and the environment upon which it depends. Art functioned within the overall life of a people, rooted in the earth, in closeness to Nature.¹⁰

As we noted in the Introduction, Aristotle pointed to the twin origins of art: imitation and delight in rhythms and harmonies.¹¹ Our bodies are rhythmic: inhaling and exhaling, walking and running, waking and sleeping, being hungry and finding satiety, experiencing the beat of the heart accelerating and slowing down. Our environment is also rhythmic: the lapping of the waves, the alternation of day and night, the seasons, with living forms becoming dormant, awakening, and putting forth new shoots, dropping their seed, and slipping back into dormancy or death. And we live in the interplay of those rhythms by reason of the harmonic functioning of our own organisms in tune with what is given in the environment.

Eighteenth-century aesthetics focused upon gardens and scenic views of Nature as well as upon works of art.¹² The latter became separated from their original public sites and were relocated to museums and private collections.¹³ Hegel, in his massive *Lectures on Fine Art*, deflected attention away from Nature and concentrated upon what he called “The System of the Arts”: architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry. At the highest level of artistic functioning, architecture formed the temple; sculpture presented the god; painting, music, and poetry celebrated the divine.¹⁴ Hegel gave special attention to what he called “the highest vocation of art”: to display the Absolute in sensuous form, that is,

¹⁰This is one of the central themes of John Dewey, developed in the very first chapter of *Art as Experience*, “The Live Creature,” 3–19. For an approach to Dewey’s aesthetics within the general conceptual framework of his thought, see the chapter on Dewey in my *Placing Aesthetics*.

¹¹*Poetics*, 1448b7.

¹²Eugene Hargrove, “The Historical Foundations of American Environmental Attitudes,” Allen, Carlson and Sheila Lintott, eds. *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 29–48 (Henceforth *NAE*).

¹³Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn, 1934), 8–10 (Henceforth *AE*).

¹⁴Hegel, *Hegel’s Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, T. Knox, trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) vol. 1, 83–7. (Henceforth *LEA*.) For an approach to Hegel’s aesthetics within the overall framework of his System, see the chapter on Hegel in my *Placing Aesthetics* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999).

to be the expression of religious sensibility.¹⁵ Following upon Christianity and its proclamation of the identity of God and Man announced in Jesus Christ, everything in which humans take an interest was included in the function of art. This led to a secularization of aesthetics where the relation between people established through production and experience of art becomes a new “holy of holies.”¹⁶ Philosophical treatments of aesthetics followed Hegel’s focus upon the arts. But Hegel also pointed out that art is nourished by attention to Nature, and to Nature it periodically returns for refreshment when it has grown stale.¹⁷ As we said in the Introduction, in very recent times there has been a movement within philosophical aesthetics to refocus attention upon Nature. And that is paralleled in art by the development of earthworks of various types.

Of course, one significant question is: just what is Nature? Observable exteriority? But observation itself is part of Nature, and there is more to Nature than its observability and our observing. Is Nature that which is simply there for our transformation of it, an Other in relation to deliberate action? Is Nature a reality independent of human action? Or is human action also part of Nature? Do we intervene in Nature arbitrarily or is it our nature to intervene and the nature of what we transform to be so transformable? Do not all organisms “intervene” in what is other than themselves? Do they not all violate what they assimilate? Prior to the complex gymnastics Heidegger exercises about the single sentence extant from Anaximander that all things have to pay restitution by their death for violating other things in order to live, does it not give us a reason why all living things have to die?¹⁸ Natures can be and are regularly violated so that other natures may flourish. Nature, Nietzsche said, is the exhibition of the Will to Power, each organism subsuming other forms to gather its own power to transcend itself in growth and reproduction.¹⁹ Death is a giving back of what we took from Nature, returning our bodies to the earth in a kind of cosmic justice.

¹⁵LFA, I, 9–11, 94.

¹⁶LFA, I, 60–1.

¹⁷LFA, I, 45.

¹⁸*The Presocratics*, G. Kirk and J. Raven, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), §112, 117. See Martin Heidegger, “The Anaximander Fragment,” *Early Greek Thinking*, D. Krell and F. Capuzzi trans. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984). 13–58.

¹⁹Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1967. *Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage.