

HOME TEAM AND VISITING TEAM IN APPLIED ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS

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1.

In his critique of Arnold Berleant's book *Living in the Landscape*, Jay Appleton sees two scientific worlds that deal with questions of environmental aesthetics, and thus also two traditions. One line starts from the classics of philosophical aesthetics, from within the field's own tradition, the other from outside, from the sphere of other disciplines and institutions. In this way, one part seeks support from Aristotle, Kant and Merleau-Ponty, the other from Darwin, psychology, and forestry. In line with this division, Appleton speaks of a home team and a visiting team, emphasizing that they *must* meet.¹ However, this need not take place as a struggle, but in co-operation and the uniting of forces!

Appleton's criticism is an exceptionally clear description of the present state of development of environmental aesthetics. During the early winter, I can compare the situation with the river I see freezing before my eyes, with the edges of the ice approaching one another. The first thin crusts of ice already extend over the river, but even so, when the open water has apparently frozen solid, it would be foolhardy to try to cross – there being a great danger of falling into a bridgeless no-man's land.

Applied Aesthetics – A Short History

Research differs from the forces of nature in that boundaries vanish the more rapidly the more determination is put into eliminating them – and the

¹Jay Appleton, Untitled Book Review on Arnold Berleant's *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (University Press of Kansas, 1997, 200 pp.), *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (1998), pp. 104–105, ref. p. 105.

very first step is to see the opposing party as an interesting partner in co-operation.

Of course, in aesthetics, too, one can always continue to live separately, but that would mean that on one side a passive, theoretical and typically classics-dominated scholarship continues, while on the other, dangerously rapid moves are made towards very practical results serving everyday decision-making. The need for unification and contacts has been realized at the University of Minnesota, where a period of study to be arranged in applied aesthetics in 1996–1999 (Phil 5504) was described as follows: "Application of concepts and theories in philosophy of art and aesthetics to practical problems in contemporary society, e.g. assessment of environmental values, artists' responsibilities, censorship."²

If there are two aesthetics, there are also two environmental aesthetics, the theoretical and the practical. Both do scholarly justified work, but rather half-heartedly if one of them is lacking.

The first person to cross the gulf at an international level was Marcia Muelder Eaton, Professor of Philosophy at the aforementioned University of Minnesota, who, as a philosophical aesthetician, has sought opportunities for co-operation, for example, with architects, landscape planners and designers.³ A corresponding enterprise that produced results in Finland was a project that began from the other side, from architecture, as research into CAD (Computer Aided Design) carried out at the Technical Research Centre of Finland in 1988–1990. Its purpose was to develop visualization techniques in order to permit public discussion and the prior criticism of building projects.

On a theoretical level, an attempt was made to promote the idea of applied aesthetics at the XIII International Congress of Aesthetics at Lahti, Finland, in 1995, the theme of which was *Aesthetics in Practice*.⁴ The intention

² 1996–1999 University of Minnesota Graduate School Catalog. Philosophy (Phil): Phil 5504. Applied Aesthetics, p. 387.

³ See Marcia Muelder Eaton, *Aesthetics and the Good Life* (London and Toronto: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Rutherford-Madison-Teaneck / Associated University Presses, 1989), especially Chapter 4, "Applied Aesthetics", pp. 66–93. Cf. my article "Applied Aesthetics" in Ossi Naukkarinen and Olli Immonen (eds.), *Art and Beyond: Finnish Approaches to Aesthetics* (Lahti: Finnish Society for Aesthetics & International Institute of Applied Aesthetics, 1995), pp. 226–248. The possibilities and limits of applied *philosophy* are discussed by Winston Nesbitt in his article "Should Philosophy be Applied?", *Philosophy in Context, An Examination of Applied Philosophy*, No. 20 (1990), pp. 22–36.

⁴ A selection of the papers was published in the four-part Congress publication, *Proceedings of the XIIIth International Congress of Aesthetics, Lahti, Finland, August 1-5, 1995*; volumes I–III by the University of Helsinki, Lahti Research and Training Centre, Lahti

was to bring the two sides referred to by Appleton (N.B., in 1998) together, but the final result was incomplete, in that the invitation mainly reached aestheticians, and only they – except for a few random outsiders – responded.

One significant project is the series of international environmental aesthetics conferences, which commenced in the summer of 1994 on the subject of the landscape. It then continued in 1996 with a forest theme and in 1998 with bogs and peatlands; the series then continued with water and water landscape theme in 2000, and with agricultural landscapes in 2003; future conferences will deal with stone and rock (2007) and the last one with the sky and heaven (2009). The goal is to create contacts and interaction between researchers and those involved in practical work. This series, compared to the Lahti Congress, seems to be more successful in bringing together both sides – researchers and professionals. The idea is a meeting between those with theoretical knowledge and those with practical skills. The process of education will then move in both directions.

On the side of traditional philosophical aesthetics, the point of departure can certainly be the classics dealing with the philosophy of beauty. The birth and growth of ecology-based environmental aesthetics in the '60s has brought forward important representatives of environmental aesthetics. The classics can be in the background. Arnold Berleant's mentors are Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the American pragmatists, particularly John Dewey. The Scot Ronald Hepburn also appeals to the classics, but the writings of the Canadian Allen Carlson rely little on authorities.

Theoreticians vs. Practitioners

The side committed to practice is divided interestingly into two – there are researchers outside of aesthetics and there are professionals of varying degrees of everyday work. Sociologists, psychologists, and jurists talk fluently about aesthetics and the values of beauty in the environment, but seldom refer to that group of writers whose home field is specialist journals like *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, or *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.

Even further in the direction of practice is that group of advisers, educators, planners, and politicians, which utilizes research. There are those who work in advisory, educational, and supervisory tasks in the area of environ-

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ment; and there are those who carry out the real, practical grass-roots work. They also speak of beauty and ugliness, they issue instructions about what to do and how – and they can do it themselves. I refer to them as hidden aestheticians. The field of aesthetics is alien, or at least distant, to them as a philosophy, but is familiar as a practice. Doug Arrell speaks of a similar situation in art, when talking of teaching aesthetics to art students.⁵

A paradoxical bipartite system has developed from this all-encompassing activation: on the one hand, there are those who investigate, speak, and write, without doing anything more concrete, and on the other are those who do, concretely, without talking very much about it. Ludwig Wittgenstein speaks illuminatingly of the tailor or cabinetmaker, whose activities and results – professional skills – show aesthetic thought.⁶ This is a kind of aesthetics of lifestyle. The ideals and goals, the programme or tacit, or silent knowledge can, in principle, be written down, as when talking of the aesthetics of some artist. This is then an answer to the question of what makes this or that artist personal, that is, what their artistic identity is based on. Just as an individual artist has an identity and an artistic image, the individual style, so may a group. Traditionally, however, aesthetics has been located on the theoreticians' side, yielding speech and writing; the other side, where the concrete work goes on, has been the world of practitioners'.

Crossbreeding?

This is the basic dilemma of theory and practice: to work in the same areas and with the same questions, but like the related animals in Franz Kafka's short story "Eine Kreuzung" ['Crossbreeding'] who do not react to each other's glance.⁷ Theory withdraws into its passive role, practice changes the world, but often neither sees or is conscious of the alternatives. Of course, there are many bridges over the gulf. One of them is that theory takes prevailing practice as the object of its metacritical research. Then it is easiest if documentary material or interviews are available, from which to investigate the strategies and logic of the argumentation, as in analytical aesthetics. The

⁵ Doug Arrell, "Teaching Aesthetics to Artists", *Aesthetics – American Society for Aesthetics Newsletter*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1997), pp. 1–4.

⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Compiled from Notes taken by Yorick Smythies, Rush Rhees and James Taylor. Edited by Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966).

⁷ Franz Kafka, "Eine Kreuzung" ("Crossbreeding"), in Paul Raabe (ed.), *Sämtliche Erzählungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983), pp. 302–303.

object of the research can be ‘art talk’s’ partner, ‘environmental talk’, which can in turn develop from conscious practice. The development of this kind of aesthetic rhetoric can be seen as one practical goal.

Naturally, not everyone needs to master the entire range from chamber philosophy to the use of axe and saw, or a timber harvester – expertise, potential and actual skills are specialized, and even in society there is a division of labour! As such, even the smallest contact with someone else’s work may be illuminating. John Fisher has emphasized the benefit to art researchers and aestheticians of personal contact with the medium in use – you learn to see the chosen medium’s restrictions and possibilities more clearly, as well as the skill required by its practice.⁸

The operating instructions for a computer, video recorder, or mobile phone may seem formidable to the ordinary consumer, though a professional thinks they are simple. In part, operations can be learnt through trial and error. Some can master an activity and its norms without using written standards – usually, we are not conscious of the rules of grammar when we speak, even though our speech has an inbuilt grammar. On both sides, we only have to see the connection to give an activity a wider framework. Thus, these connections and the consideration of them work in both directions.

What Does Practice Include?

One way to build bridges between theory and practice is to problematize what doing actually is. Doing takes place clearly at least when someone fells a forest, digs ditches in a marsh, clears a field, builds a road, demolishes buildings, or builds new ones. But behind every such act there is – at least nowadays and at least in developed countries – a great deal of paperwork: building designs, application for permits, loan arrangements, building contracts. Behind all of this there is in turn legislation, research, education, and training. Design and various preparations often take place far from the site of doing: the performer becoming a kind of human machine, which only works, without taking or being given responsibility. The division between passive and active operations is thus very fluid. A mechanical doer is, despite all the busyness, passive, while the planner cogitating at the desk is active.

Aesthetic expertise is also the art of argumentation, the justification of doing, and not simply mechanical doing. Argumentation includes the depic-

⁸ John Fisher, “Editorial”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1975), pp. 3–6.

tion of the object, its interpretation and evaluation; a field in which especially those who depict nature, as well as other environmental critics, are at their best. This may develop into a contradiction between being an expert and being a lay person: the expert makes justified solutions that will stand in a broader context, the lay person acts narrowly in a confined sphere. Listening to justifications means giving weight to argumentation; sociological investigations of taste may offer verdict-like results concerning questions of good and bad, without showing how the results were arrived at and how durable their base is.

Though we cannot limit doing only to physical work, there is good reason to honour this aspect of doing as such. No drawings, instructions, or supervision can replace a worker's diligence and developed skill. However, as J. L. Austin states in his classic essay "How to do Things with Words" (1962), many acts are carried out with language.⁹ We order, forbid, incite, recommend, threaten, thank, apologise – with words. Some are even connected to legal sanctions – if you write a libel, you will be held responsible. There is also doing on a more abstract level and in a social sphere: legislation and its application, the preparation of a curriculum, and teaching itself. Doing should not be considered too narrowly, nor should it be monopolised by any group; the matter is rather one of layers of doing than of performance being the final link in a chain.

Aesthetics belongs to all stages; at each one decisions and acts relevant to beauty are made. The spectrum from aesthetics as research to aesthetics as activity and a way of life is thus flexible and the connection in principle – if not, unfortunately, in practice – is unbroken. On the one hand are the skills and mental work based on thought, on the other are the skills based on technical expertise and physical performance. Manual labour is increasingly abstract to become the supervision of machines; the machine does the heavy work – but of course cannot be saddled with aesthetic or other responsibility – or should we write rules into a computer program to prevent solutions unsuitable to a style?

When we speak of applied aesthetics in general, and applied environmental aesthetics in particular, there is a hint of a one-way movement: of general theoretical aesthetics being the point of departure, on which all application is based. (This idea is visible through the course at the University of Minnesota.) The idea would then be to bring aesthetics closer to practice,

⁹J. L. Austin, "How to Do Things With Words", in J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, ed. by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975; Second edition [1st ed. 1962, based on lectures given in 1955]).

so that everyday needs would begin to influence, for example, what is investigated and why. Objects and goals would be determined from the point of view of benefit. People are needed who respond, as well as the interaction arising from meeting: applied aesthetics is reflected in the making of philosophical aesthetics. Traffic is in both directions, and ideally the route is open both ways, with quite as many moving one way as the other.

Emergent, and Vanishing Aesthetics

If we consider the two aesthetics outlined by Appleton, which have not, but which should encounter each other, there is also traffic in another direction, or the creation of an emergent aesthetics: the aestheticization of such specialized sciences as forestry, a becoming sensitive to questions of the experiencing of a forest and the experiences produced by a forest.

One must then consider one's own actions from the point of view of how they affect the value goals: whether they promote or prevent. In precisely this way – separate from the currents of academic aesthetics – a relatively widespread quantitative form of research has arisen: for example, sociological measurements are made of how people experience different types of forest felling, with recommendations formed on this basis, naturally including such aspects as species protection. Applied aesthetics – without the term being spoken about or used as such – has arisen from practical demands, but across the river from the viewpoint of academic aesthetics.

If aestheticians like myself – who normally work in a university and most often in a department of philosophy within it – seek applications, they begin to move more or less outwards from their own field, towards the margin – and become marginalized in the view of the field. The basis of growth is the field's research and discussion tradition, the formation of a school of thought. To progress concretely, they should – depending on the questions – be able to connect their own philosophical expertise to an area of science that is sensible in terms of the task: they must themselves be familiar with another field, or else find another party, with whom to create the necessary synergy. Thus, the tasks of applied aesthetics are normally group work, in which different participants and experts meet, but can also accept one another on a personal level, to acquaint themselves with fields foreign to them. Proceeding from two directions leads to a meeting – and to a strengthening through meeting. This also includes alliances and co-operation with the specialists who are relevant then. Theory and practice meet at a personal level.

If, on the other hand, the synergy is not found, what was a good inten-

tion may, in the worst case, result in a loss of one's own identity as a researcher through real marginalization: a voluntary relinquishing of expertise or a contempt for it, and a rapid attempt, ending in amateurishness, to acquire unfounded special expertise. The result is a pitiable state, in which the aesthetician destroys his or her specialty, without benefiting anyone, despite noble intentions.

At a theoretical level, the problem is that, because by definition aesthetics includes philosophicalness, in becoming concrete and specialized it loses its character and becomes something else. The more one goes into details, the less remains of actual aesthetics and the more there is in the share of special sciences and knowledge, which – if aesthetics does not take care – will swamp it.

When researchers work together in their own group, their scientific thought and attitude acts as a unifying factor, whatever their field and school of thought, even though their fields are far apart. In this situation, aesthetics as a branch of the humanities must co-operate with branches of the natural sciences, the social sciences, or even medical science. This is, however, a matter of a broad community of researchers, and in that sense it is an operating environment with familiar rules of the game.

Hidden Aesthetics and Normative Aesthetics

The most distant and, from the point of view of a traditional humanist, the most challenging situations arise when co-operation extends beyond the circle of researchers: to administration, organizations, politics, or to various professional groups, such as architects, teachers and their pupils, artists, and farmers. This journey leads to hidden aesthetics. Aesthetics can be said to be principles or rules expressed in actions.

Conceptions of beauty may be expressed as an artist's manifesto or as the guidelines of an advisory board, or in the form of law. Here, aesthetics is applied in the broad sense that action includes acts significant in terms of beauty. Action may result, for example, in a harmonic agricultural landscape, a varied forest, exciting cities, and individual good and bad achievements in these. We may praise or blame a maker or a community of makers.

When the two teams that have started from opposite sides are brought together, it is necessary to include both applied aesthetics developed from traditional aesthetics as well as research in a field that has grown from specialized sciences. Besides research, there is a need for the entire spectrum of the leisure activities and work, in which solutions are developed in everyday

life. This is the area of hidden aesthetics, which there have been some attempts to make visible in metacritical research. In this area can be seen the program declaration aesthetics and manifestoes that give norms to the makers themselves, to some grouping, or to making in general.

Stefan Morawski justifies his criticism of applied aesthetics with the idea that it would be purely a matter of giving norms, an aesthetics of norms.¹⁰ However, this is only one aspect of applied aesthetics, one that is not even essential, and certainly one that has no need to lead to the provocative extreme examples provided by him: artists working as the vassals of Stalin or Hitler, forced to carry out an aesthetic programme decreed from above. Undoubtedly, it is good to be aware of this danger lurking behind effective influence. That it is real, can be seen, for example, in the power of centralized forestry instructions.

It is essential to see applicability and implementability in such a way that the question is of the conscious use of aesthetic expertise to solve real problems. The norms and regulations governing forestry, the extraction of minerals, restoration, and other treatment of the environment, as well as the legislation applying to them must be simultaneously open and subject to fundamental criticism. If necessary, they must be able to be amended and rescinded. This need may arise not only when values and evaluations change, but also when research in the fields brings new knowledge, or technical changes or change of the world of values alters ways of working and life. Thus normativity and change do not necessarily exclude one another; the question is of social strategies. What is needed above all is a culture of aesthetic discussion and argumentation.

The Ethicist – a Role Model for the Aestheticist

A philosophical consultation can be carried out discretely, simply, and clearly, with the ideal of reduction and succinctness. “Most writers waste the reader’s time with works that are too long,” said Samuel Beckett in a television interview. Taking his ideal to an extreme, and succeeding in this, he strove towards the blank page, resulting in texts that became increasingly

¹⁰ Stefan Morawski, “My Critical Supplement to Lahti’s Pious Illusion”, in Göran Hermerén (ed.), *International Yearbook of Aesthetics* 1 (1966), Lund, 1966, pp. 87–93. See also a second opinion by Arnold Berleant, “Aesthetics in Practice and the Practice of Aesthetics”, in the same volume, pp. 80–86. Cf. Philip Alperson’s “Review of the *International Yearbook of Aesthetics* 1 (1966)” in the *American Society for Aesthetics Newsletter*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1988), pp. 1–3.

terse as he aged, radio plays whittled down to monologues, plays reduced to pantomimes. The final aim appeared to be – but only appeared to be – the same as a blank sheet or a grey computer display in front of someone suffering from writer’s block.

Besides everything else, an applied aesthetician cares for, and is a therapist of the human mind and social relations, e.g. of social environments and their aesthetics. One can show that a question bothering a customer is actually wrongly set, or is only an apparent question, or that some point of view has been left out, or that although the question itself is sensible it cannot be resolved with present knowledge. The philosophers’ consulting rooms that have begun operations in recent years in different parts of the world have emphasized the caring aspect; the question may have had only a therapeutic nature, to satisfy the customer’s need for discussion. Still, one should be careful not to think that being concerned with philosophical questions is an illness. It is the cause of the unpleasantness and unease and not a curious and questioning mind, or a person who reacts easily to aesthetic defects, that needs care.

An important anthology, *Puzzles about Art* (1989), deals with real and invented problems; it introduces a cavalcade of tens of different examples, such cases as: should a *Pietà* or *Last Supper*, damaged by vandals, be restored, or how should someone regard forged Vermeers?¹¹ Even an invented problem may be a pedagogically fruitful means of leading to the solution to a problem – but, of course, there are so many and varied real-life problems that there is no need to specially invent them. A solution to a problem is a matter of intelligence and skill. Some problems naturally recur, so that a solution to one can be transferred to be a solution elsewhere. Some vary or are unique, in which case that which perhaps changes, is the skill to see and recognise problems, to recognise choices that have been passed without being recognised as choices, and to dispute or question solutions that have become automatic.

The first task, when someone has a problem to which a solution is needed, is to attempt to decide what special expertise and experts are required to solve it. Problems may be at a very different level of abstraction. – And what about problems in which aesthetic values are supportive? Such a problem

¹¹ Margaret P. Battin, John Fisher, Ronald Moore, Anita Silvers (eds.), *Puzzles About Art: An Aesthetics Casebook* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989). In his introduction “Practical Aesthetics in Practice and in Theory” to the Lahti Congress publication *Vol. III: Practical Aesthetics*, pp. 7–10, the volume editor Martti Honkanen deals similarly with the environmental improvement projects in the city of Joensuu, Finland, in which local artists participated.

may be the connection between the environment and health. How aesthetic quality affects health and happiness; and how to design an environment that would be healthy as an ecosystem, as well as being healthy and pleasant to its inhabitants, i.e. in a certain way an instrument for producing health? In this model of thought, the aesthetic point of view is a kind of sub-plot, though properly integrated with everything else. Then the matter is no longer one of *question – answer* type of advisory or consultation service only, though that too is needed like consultation in questions of ethics, law and marital problems.

I would like to see an expert in aesthetics giving advice like Randy Cohen, The Ethicist at *The New York Times*, in his field of practical ethics. An individual question published and answered on the newspaper pages is trying simultaneously to give an answer to a lot of readers who have encountered a similar problem.¹² The imaginary aesthetician's shop, presented by E. Louis Lankford in his book *Aesthetics: Issues and Inquiry*¹³ dealing with children's art education, can be an example of a practical aesthetician's mode of operation in the future: the aesthetician offers one's own expertise to solve the customer's problem. The researcher's task is to create a philosophically sound basis for advice and consultation. Others do the practical work: the intellectual (teaching, education, administration, legislation), and the physical (construction work, forest felling, farming).

Conclusion

Theoretical environmental aesthetics extends towards practice without merging into it and while retaining its philosophical nature. It becomes functional philosophy. Academic aesthetics meets the aesthetics hidden in people's lives and thought. The philosopher encounters the diversity and abundance of taste in everyday life. In it, one seeks and finds cultural regularities, at least some of which are more obvious to the outsider than to those who have lived in them all their lives.

The question of what is aesthetics, more limitedly applied aesthetics, and even more limitedly applied environmental aesthetics, closely follows the question of who is an aesthetician, more precisely an applied aestheti-

¹² Randy Cohen, "The Ethicist" from *The New York Times Magazine*, has also published a collection of questions and answers titled *The Good, The Bad & the Difference. How to Tell Right from Wrong in Everyday Situations* (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

¹³ E. Louis Lankford, *Aesthetics: Issues and Inquiry* (Reston, VA: The National Art Education Association, 1992).

cian/aestheticist, and even more precisely an applied environmental aesthetician/aestheticist. The delimitation can be made on scholarly grounds according to the bipartite division I have presented: there are applied aestheticians ‘descending’ from the tradition of academic philosophical aesthetics, and there are applied aestheticians that ‘rise’ from the area of specialized sciences. In addition, there are hidden applied environmental aestheticians in the spheres of environmental administration and politics, and in various environmental professions.

And there are entrepreneurs, those who follow their own paths. Jean Giono’s hero Elzéard Bouffier, ‘The Man Who Planted Trees,’ is exemplary: through his quiet lifelong activity he turned a barren landscape green, created his own monument, left a trace of himself.¹⁴

¹⁴ Jean Giono, *The Man Who Planted Trees* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Co., 1995). Original French *L’homme qui plantait des arbres* published by Gallimard, Paris, in 1980.