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ABSTRACT

If aesthetics is to claim its place among the fundamental philosophical disciplines, it must adequately deal with the ecological challenge, that is, the need to explain the continuity-relation between human and non-human environments. To that effect, Arnold Berleant's aesthetics of engagement constitutes an attractive proposal. Its critics (Allen Carlson and others) seem to miss its point and attack it on the basis of a particular understanding of Kantian aesthetics (mainly the disinterestedness thesis). But not only can Berleant's aesthetics meet the ecological challenge; it is also possible that it encourages a re-evaluation of traditional aesthetic categories (like disinterestedness) without necessarily precipitating a need to jettison their deeply entrenched significance.

KEY WORDS

aesthetic care, aesthetics of engagement, aesthetics of separation, art, Berleant, disinterestedness, ecology, experience, nature, objectivity, perception, science, subjectivity

1. Caring about the Environment

There is a sense in which our epistemic relation to the environment, as the sum of whatever surrounds us, would appear to dictate the way in which we may wish to treat, perceive, or conceive our environment. For instance, our present-day ecological concerns are a decisive feature of the different ways we have come to relate to the environment. These ecological concerns are, of course, partly the result of mounting scientific evidence to the effect that whatever goes around comes around, that is, in altering our environment to suit our various needs and wishes we are inadvertently altering the conditions that give rise to these needs and wishes. In other words, science as the paradigmatic set of available epistemic tools makes us realize that, in altering our environment, we are altering ourselves, since our needs and wishes cannot be satisfied outside the environment as the continuum we are an integral part of. Consequently, it makes sense perhaps to say that getting to know our environment, getting to know the way natural processes develop and interact, makes us change our attitude towards it. It makes us appreciate the unbreakable link that transposes our well-being into the wider embrace of the environment's well-being and well-functioning. Aesthetic appreciation of natural and human-made environments is, of course, one aspect of this unbreakable link to whatever we need or wish to gain from our surroundings. This is the aspect I wish to concentrate on in this paper.

The crucial distinction here is precisely the distinction between the human element and the non-human element; the distinction between the contained and the container. In order to understand properly the nature of aesthetic experience, this distinction needs to be qualified. Is it then, as above, an epistemically derived distinction? Without going into great detail concerning science and its methodologies, what is undoubtedly involved in the ecological scientific understanding of the environment is a claim to (some high degree of) objectivity. This claim amounts to the familiar requirement that epistemic detachment be necessary for proper scientific examination. The workings of the environment are better revealed to its human scientific observer when the epistemic distance between the two is

maintained. This is perhaps as it should be. However, scientific detachment concerning the environment cannot function in itself as the basis for *caring about* the environment (and about its human inhabitants). The most brilliant of environmental scientists does not have to see anything, as an environmental scientist, in, for instance, the possible extinction of the human species from the face of the Earth, other than perhaps one more phase in the constant change of natural landscapes, ruled by relevant processes, causes, and effects, etc.

In other words, the appreciation of our surroundings on an epistemic basis does not warrant any sort of consideration to the effect that our surroundings are also worth conserving, that it is a good thing to protect and promote life, that nature is beautiful, and so on. The ecological scientific approach is by no means incompatible with such considerations but it cannot provide any grounds for them, either. Therefore, an aesthetics that describes the relation between human and non-human environments in terms of epistemic distance and discontinuity is at best incomplete. The alternative is, of course, a view according to which the environment is not merely some sort of objective externality waiting to be categorized and departmentalized on the basis of human needs and wishes. Being fully aware of the interdependency relations linking human and non-human environments, this alternative aesthetics speaks of engagement and of return to the environment as the seamless extension of our limbs, our senses, and our ideas.

2. Repatriation and the Environment

The notion of repatriation, which serves here as a metaphor for the general argument I am defending, is bound up with a few basic implications. First, there must be such a thing as a "homeland." In the present context, this homeland is obviously the environment as the sum of whatever surrounds us. It includes not only natural surroundings but also human-made structures and, in a sense, our body itself (to the degree that we perceive it as something at least partly external).^[1] Repatriation also obviously implies a condition of separation or departure from the homeland. For repatriation as "return to" the homeland means that we are no longer inhabitants of the environment, which we may perceive as our homeland. It follows that a relation of externality or distance seems to apply between what is perceived as surrounding (that is, the environment) and what is being surrounded (that is, the human observer). Crucially, however, it is finally implied that a return to the homeland is in itself something worth pursuing. Repatriation is about cancelling somehow the distance separating us from the externality of whatever surrounds us because we wish to become again part of the real or imagined homeland.

As argued above, epistemic or cognitive appropriation does not suffice as an explanation for our need to care about our environment and possibly to derive pleasure from it, aesthetic or otherwise. In fact, cognitive appropriation is perfectly consistent with maintaining and even increasing a lack of care. For the relation of externality separating us from our environment becomes the very foundation of our getting to know the environment objectively and scientifically. The scientific model does not primarily concern itself with how to relate to the object of knowledge (that is the environment). It studies this object already *within* its externality. The route of repatriation is completely hidden from view, which means that the possibility of returning to the homeland and of taking care of it can never be actualized.

Furthermore, the route of repatriation is not opened up by

the impetus to familiarize oneself, in the ordinary sense, with as many different kinds of environments as possible. Narrowing the distance of indifference, which separates us from what surrounds us, is not simply about "having been there," "seen this," "done that." If one has not set out armed with a caring attitude, eager to recognize and to embrace unfamiliar environments, then whatever one meets and perceives on one's way may always remain beyond the threshold of care and genuine appreciation. Plotinus, in his own context, put it thus:

"Let us flee then to the beloved Fatherland": this is the soundest counsel. But what is this flight? How are we to gain the open sea? [] The Fatherland to us is There whence we have come, and There is The Father. What then is our course, what the manner of our flight? This is not a journey for the feet; the feet bring us only from land to land; nor need you think of coach or ship to carry you away; all this order of things you must set aside and refuse to see: you must close the eyes and call instead upon another vision which is to be waked within you, a vision, the birth-right of all, which few turn to use. [2]

This is indeed an altogether different kind of vision. A kind of vision that, although perceiving the surroundings as somewhat external or unfamiliar to the eye, also perceives their difference as an invitation back to the homeland, as a sure sign of the fact that what sees and what is seen must care about each other as they care about their own selves [3]. Namely, it is no longer the case that we are only surrounded by the environment but that we are also part of that very environment. The route of repatriation does not lead away from us but defines the context of our intricate relation with what seemed to be around us at a distance. We are part of the environment and the environment is partly us. The homeland is not somewhere "out there" because we are already part of it.

Far from belonging to an otherworldly state of affairs, this Plotinian imagery has already become entrenched (even if unconsciously so) in our dealings with nature and the environment, and in our newly found sense of being one with nature, of being shaped, in turn, by the shapes we impose on our surroundings, and of being dependant for our well-being in general on the well-being of the different specific environments we are part of. Neither science nor the tourist consciousness *alone* have proved adequate guides for the discovery that we inadvertently belong to the places and spaces we seem to inhabit. For science and the tourist consciousness, there is and there will always be "some other place" to explore not currently related to our present homeland, and definitely not presupposing any caring attitude on our part. It is true that, as I pointed out before, this newly found homeland implies a prior condition of having been separate from it. But no matter; it is better late than never.

My further claim then is this: If we are to work for a meaningful philosophical understanding of the aesthetic aspect of nature and the environment, this understanding has to accommodate our deep and justified ecological concerns. Such concerns are perhaps more readily defensible on moral, political, economical, and other similar grounds. But they should also be defensible on aesthetic grounds, employing ideas like repatriation as the opposite of distance,

externality, and lack of care. This prospect is not only promising for the environment; it can also attest to the centrality of aesthetics as an active and profoundly relevant philosophical discipline.

3. Aesthetics of Repatriation

In this perspective, Berleant's aesthetics of the environment can be accurately described as an aesthetics of repatriation. [4] It is an aesthetics that seeks to reconcile the perceivable world and its human inhabitant, and to cancel the distance of indifference that may be separating them, because meeting our aesthetic needs and wishes is tantamount to caring about our environment in an aesthetic sense (and vice versa). This aesthetics concentrates on the multiple levels of experiencing the environment while being an integral part of it. Berleant calls this an "aesthetics of engagement." What is engaged is our capacity to feel and sense our surroundings in a way that does not pose false barriers between the alleged subject and object of feeling and sensing. What is activated is all of our senses without exception (smell, touch, taste, sight, hearing, kinaesthesia, sense of balance, and so on). [5] Our whole body becomes a place of meeting between the inside and the outside; it is no longer the case that we are concerned with how the inside and the outside may be, or may have been, different.

The points that follow highlight briefly the particular ways in which Berleant's aesthetics is an aesthetics of repatriation in the above sense. (These points will subsequently be addressed from the converse perspective, the one that could be described as the aesthetics of separation.)

A. Perception and Sensibility

The aesthetics of engagement is naturally an aesthetics of perceptual engagement. However, perceptions are never only bare facts. What is perceived through the senses is at the same time *understood* as being perceived through the senses. It is never a purely external event that happens to affect the mechanics of our bodies. It can never be stripped of all semantic significance, of all association with prior knowledge, memory, connotation, evocative content, intentional design, and so on. "Being sensible" means "being perceivable," but also "making good sense." Berleant is explicit in using the term 'sensibility' "in its double significance, referring both to the senses and to meanings, for perception and import join in the integrity of our experience." [6] The process of repatriation can be now activated. What is perceived does not of course coincide with the perceiver; but it can only make sense for the perceiver to the degree that it becomes part of his or her web of related experiences. We do not receive signals from the environment that surrounds us without being conscious of the fact that we are contained in it, that we *are* partly it, and that we should care about it as we care about ourselves.

B. Art and Nature

An aesthetics of experiential engagement with the environment obviously relates to both natural and artificial environments; to landscapes and cityscapes; to cave-dwellings and building-dwellings; to flowers and machines; and so on. "The entire sensible world is included within the purview of aesthetics," Berleant says. [7] Art, the traditionally favored subject matter of philosophical aesthetics, must also be included here. For art cannot but be part of our environment, just like everything else. There is no obvious reason for raising a barrier between experiencing artworks and experiencing our everyday surroundings in an engaged

way. Berleant stresses precisely the relation of "continuity between art and life." [8] Art deals with ways of experiencing the world no less than living itself does. We rediscover the world as our homeland, and art is part of this homeland.

C. Disinterestedness, the Contemplating Subject, and the Contemplated Object

Perception and nature thus broadly conceived are perfectly consistent with the pervasive ecological concerns of our times, and are in accordance with the repatriation model employed here. Berleant's further central objective is to safeguard the dynamic of this account by attacking disinterestedness as the dominant aesthetic category of traditional Western aesthetics. Disinterestedness is linked to the rise of the Fine Arts, to the idea of "art for art's sake," and to certain versions of formalism. It is traceable back through Kant to some of the early modern British empiricists. [9] According to Budd's formulation (following Kant), "a positive affective response to an item is disinterested only if it is not, or not just, pleasure in the satisfaction of a desire that the world should be a certain way." [10] We are not supposed to take pleasure in aesthetically experiencing the world just because we may derive any truths from this experience or just because we may realize what kinds of things could turn this world into a better place for us. The focus of our pleasure is supposed to be the experience itself. For the aesthetics of engagement, this very fact may not necessarily be a problem, as I am going to point out towards the end of this paper. Just as is the case with the scientific, detached consciousness, aesthetic disinterestedness does not necessarily dictate a lack of aesthetic care about the environment; but it is surely compatible with such a lack. In fact, all it does is to deny that the aesthetic attitude implies a particular kind of foundation; it does not, however, seem to propose an alternative foundation. It seems to be suggesting that, once we strip away every "desire that the world should be a certain way," there is still something left, and this thing is the aesthetic experience. But there is no reason given for this leftover as a quasi default function of the human mind.

Therefore, there is indeed a fundamental sense in which the care and repatriation principle can be illuminating here as a truly alternative description of aesthetic experience. For, in talking about an "affective response to an item," we have unwittingly separated the response from the item, the surroundings from the surrounded; and we have artificially created the default vacuum. Disinterested contemplation of the surroundings is misleading for it implies a state of mind and an observing subject distinct from, and apparently immune to, the state of affairs or objects that help shape the observing subject itself. In accordance with Berleant's point of view, traditional aesthetics of such a persuasion arbitrarily and falsely fractures the actual continuity of the content of aesthetic experience without adequately compensating for this and, therefore, without actually giving any credence to the duty of aesthetic care towards the environment.

D. An Experience That Is Aesthetic Throughout

In many ways, Berleant's project for an experientially engaged aesthetics echoes some of Dewey's early concerns in the first half of the twentieth century. Dewey describes the basic condition for all experience and, thus, the basic condition for any aesthetic experience in terms of a

felt relationship between doing and

undergoing as the organism and environment interact. Position expresses the poised readiness of the live creature to meet the impact of surrounding forces, to meet so as to endure and to persist, to extend or expand through undergoing the very forces that, apart from its response, are indifferent and hostile. [\[11\]](#)

Berleant's engaged aesthetic response similarly consists in the dynamic and fluctuating rhythm that keeps the perceiver and what is perceived in a sort of harmonious and intertwined relationship of constant give and take (or take and give). Denying the reality of this relationship means denying the reality of the related parts—the organism and the environment. Since, then, this relationship is at its core an engaged one, and since experiential engagement is for Berleant the mark of the aesthetic, the implication is that *all* experience as such, that is, all experience as engaged experience, is also aesthetically charged. "The aesthetic becomes, then, a universal category, not *the* universal category but the omnipresent concept of a pervasive feature of experience." [\[12\]](#) Universally aesthetic experience is not, of course, the contemplative reception of objects; it is the making sense of reception, of objects, and of subjects alike. We do not suddenly discover that the whole world is beautiful; it is our engaged interrelation with the world, our caring about it, which nurtures beauty. Beauty or any other aesthetic category resides in the bridges we build while engaging experientially with the world; it is neither "here" on our side (accessed internally) nor "there" on the other side (passively awaiting to be discovered). There is also an important further offshoot in this sort of engaged aesthetics which is that as much as it is about engagement with the surrounding environments, it is also about engagement with other human beings that are part of these environments. In other words, it is a humanizing aesthetics, as well as an ecological aesthetics.

4. Aesthetics of Separation

A. Perception and Sensibility

From a general perspective that appears to be opposing all this, the aesthetic nature of perception is often qualified in terms of different kinds of ontological distinctions or different degrees of separation between those experiences that may be deemed as aesthetic and those that are allegedly not so. Various philosophies of art find it legitimate to disregard the aesthetics of experiencing the environment, as opposed to the aesthetics of experiencing those segments of the environment that may qualify as art. This is, after all, one of the reasons why environmental aesthetics has had a relatively short history.

Hegel believed that beauty in art stands ontologically higher than any beauty in nature because of the privileged relation holding between art and what he calls the Ideal. [\[13\]](#) The perception of beauty in art involves a coming into contact with a loftier universal consciousness, whereas nature lies at a lower level that is almost impenetrable by this consciousness. Nature is, of course, perceivable, but in a way that does not make it possible for our aesthetic sensibilities to be activated (at least not beyond a crucial point). This is then an aesthetics of separation and disengagement from certain aspects of experience.

B. Art and Nature

More recently, in his discussion about found objects as artworks, or about the distinction between art and non-art, Lamarque notes that

Warhol's work [Brillo Boxes], as well as being made up of physical objects, is also an intentional object in this technical sense: it embodies a thought, it has a content, it expresses a meaning and it is embedded in art history, whereas the other objects [commercial Brillo boxes] have no meaning and do not stand for anything, even though they too are human artefacts, have a function and conform to a design. [14]

Again, perceiving one's environment (instantiated here by the *commercial* Brillo boxes) is seen as devoid of thought, content, meaning, history. In other words, nature in this form remains inert and not subject to experiential engagement. The fact of its artificiality, its function and design, the link to particular modes of our experience of the world (as commodification "automata," for example) is meant to be meaningless something that is indeed a contradiction in terms.

Of course, the commercial Brillo boxes are part of a created, artificial environment; they are part of a "nature" created by humans. In this respect, not only does the aesthetics of separation raise questionable barriers between art and non-art but also between created and non-created environments. For, presumably, if the commercial Brillo box lies outside of what is taken as the privileged locus of aesthetic experience (i.e. Warhol's Brillo Boxes) on count of an artificiality that is not artistic, then it seems that, say, the view through my window and out on the river must be "twice-removed" on the same count, according to the aesthetics of separation. [15] However, for the aesthetics of care and repatriation, natural environments that are not conceived as human creations are still inseparable from certain meanings, functions, histories, values that help define them. Enjoying the view from my window involves a deep awareness of such meanings and functions, etc.; an awareness of my own particular state of mind, of the river's changeable surface, of the sounds and smells coming from within my room and from without, of past, present, and anticipated relevant observations, memories, thoughts, intentions, and so on. If such factors define the aesthetic experience of what Lamarque accepts as art (i.e. Warhol's Brillo Boxes), they should also suffice for experiencing aesthetically what he rejects as non-art (i.e. commercial Brillo boxes). Furthermore, they should also suffice for experiencing aesthetically what seems to lie still further away in the long chain of interaction between human and non-human nature, such as the river I see out of my window.

Undoubtedly, such accounts of the aesthetic cannot be taken as refutations of Berleant's aesthetics of engagement, since they seem at least to leave the possibility of aesthetic engagement with nature open in principle. However, they are clearly incongruent with the wider ecological (and thus also humanistic) concerns addressed by the aesthetics of repatriation and of care about the environment, and this is all I wish to defend here.

C. Disinterestedness, the Contemplating Subject, and the Contemplated Object

Against Berleant, to suppose that there are degrees of aesthetic separation, as above, amounts, in effect, to revert to the comforting situation of externality and objectification. It seems comforting because it allows us to avoid the trouble of engaging and cancelling the barriers that prevent aesthetic care and repatriation. (Remember Plotinus, above: "Call instead upon another vision which is to be waked within you, a vision, the birth-right of all, which few turn to use.") But, remarkably, it is precisely this aesthetic duty, so to speak, that Carlson finds difficult to accept. Berleant's aesthetic experience is, for Carlson, much like a "subjective flight of fancy."^[16] There seem to be no "objective" grounds on which to test the validity of this experience. The relation between the experiencing subject and the experienced object becomes one of many other "subjective" relations such as love, relations that "notoriously lack objectivity. It is a well-known fact that every child appears beautiful to his or her parents."^[17]

Naturally, on the one hand, to say that what is taken to be subjective lacks objectivity does not explain either subjectivity or objectivity. On the other hand, to say that the love for one's children is somehow aesthetically biased shows that either one has never loved or that one refuses to see what love is about. The love for one's children is of course *all about being biased*. When I say I find my child beautiful, I do not maintain that "I am making a subjective aesthetic claim, that may turn out to be false on some external objective grounds." Even if there were indeed any external objective grounds on which to test such a judgment, this judgment would no longer be about the relation between my child and myself; it would be about something entirely different. (The robustness perhaps of my child's bone structure? The symmetry of his or her facial features?)

Similarly, Budd swiftly dismisses the whole of Berleant's project on the basis that it does away with disinterested, "objective" attention and the contemplative attitude without providing anything to replace them with.^[18] But how to replace something that was not even there in the first place? Were it not for the distorting lens of the aesthetics of separation, the perceived or contemplated, together with the one that perceives or contemplates, would have always remained intertwined.

Of course, it is always legitimate to turn to the aesthetics of repatriation itself and question the ways in which perceiver and perceived are thus distinct while remaining deeply engaged and involved with one another. However, neither Carlson nor Budd seem to be addressing this point. Therefore, I need not be concerned with it regarding my main argument here.^[19]

D. An Experience That Is Aesthetic Throughout

Finally, the ubiquitous universality of Berleant's engaged aesthetics may be questioned as unable to distinguish between "superficial" aesthetic experiences and "serious" aesthetic experiences. If everything and anything can be experienced aesthetically from the engagement point of view, there may be a problem in evaluating different experiences. Again, for Carlson this problem forces us to focus on the "true character" of nature, which is by and large the subject matter of our natural sciences. His natural environmental model is precisely intended as a model for the appreciation of the environment, an appreciation that becomes aesthetic as far as it is enriched by our knowledge about the inner workings of nature.^[20] Carlson writes:

Information about the object's nature, about its genesis, type, and properties, is necessary for appropriate aesthetic appreciation. For example, in appreciating a natural environment such as an alpine meadow, it is important to know, for instance, that it survives under constraints imposed by the climate of high altitude. With such knowledge comes the understanding that diminutive size in flora is an adaptation to such constraints. [][\[21\]](#)

That one needs to be aware of alpine biology in order to appreciate aesthetically the alpine meadow sounds bizarre, to say the least. As I argued at the beginning, no amount of scientific knowledge about natural environmental processes can inescapably, in and of itself, trigger aesthetic appreciation. Compare the account given by the haiku poet Noburo Fujiwara:

Every place is full of poetry. All one has to do is go find the poems. That's why we can write one hundred poems in a day about a place we visit. We select an interesting and beautiful place and, on the spot, compose its poetry.[\[22\]](#)

The poet is simply immersed into the environment without having to turn to the physicist's laboratory. And not only does he experience nature aesthetically but he is also able to transform this into art, which seems to be enriching and extending the original experience. It is true that in this particular instance the poet seems to be inspired by "interesting and beautiful" places. But this does not have to be the norm. A devastated, polluted, or conventionally ugly and uninteresting environment can be equally well-experienced aesthetically and spur aesthetic creativity as the expression of corresponding sentiments, for example. What is decisive is the attitude of aesthetic care and the repatriating relation of engagement with that environment; not the environment's features when these are viewed under the dissecting eye of a scientifically oriented consciousness.

Damien Hirst once described the World Trade Center disaster notoriously as a work of unparalleled art in terms of its visual impact and power. He later tried to disassociate explicitly this impact from the disaster's wickedness. Namely, he tried to identify and single out one aspect of our experiencing this event, an aspect that relies on our ability to connect to the event as a seismic shake-up of our inner feelings. It is not by simply contemplating the event but by trying to imagine ourselves *within* it that we might begin to sense this impact and its power to reshape our understanding of our own relation to the possibility of evil, our relation to the tragedies of human life and, furthermore, to the tragedies of human political history. The fact that it did not presumably entail any sort of artistic intentions, and the fact that it inadvertently affected a cityscape rather than a natural landscape, do not alter fundamentally our relation to this event as a relation to the externality of what surrounds us.

Needless to say, one may not become profoundly affected by the most enticing of natural or created environments but one is surely capable of engaging in some sort of aesthetic conversation with such an environment. That all engaged experience is aesthetic does not exclude the possibility of

having degrees of engagement and of immersion in the experience. In other words, it is not the case that the aesthetics of repatriation makes us feel at a loss when we need to compare relevant experiences. To return to my experience of the view outside my window, I could spend a whole life simply by looking at the river outside for the purpose of relaxing my eyes away from my computer screen. Almost any sort of view would do for this purpose. However, this experience of mine can become more and more engaged and, thus, more and more aesthetic, to the extent that I actually manage to imagine myself as coming into a more direct kind of experiential contact with the river outside or further toward the horizon. I could begin to see the river's surface as an invitation to explore the contours of the flowing water, to uncover what may lie underneath the surface, or even to willingly alter all this (in the spirit perhaps of some of Robert Smithson's work[23]). Or, further, I could imagine the whole river as a meandering corridor of mirror or glass, where it would be possible to walk on and imaginatively transfer my senses and my thoughts about what now appears as my distant surroundings (perhaps now in the spirit of Christo and Jeanne-Claude[24]). In every case, I could see increasingly my whole being as a formation that involves, somehow crucially, the existence of the observed view outside and of the ways in which I can interact with it. In doing this, I would become increasingly engaged with what I see in a way that can only be described as aesthetic, engendered through my caring about the river as I care about my own particular position in the world.

Carlson again seems to think that this is not enough, that degrees of aesthetic appreciation are inadequate in accounting for qualitatively differing aesthetic experiences. [25] But if this is true (and I am not at all sure it is), Carlson's own natural environmental model must find itself in exactly the same position. For, presumably, the more I know about the natural processes shaping a given environment, the more my aesthetic appreciation of it becomes complete.

Perhaps more importantly, Carlson's reliance on information supplied by the natural sciences constitutes a kind of choice that is itself theoretically suspect. At best, it is a choice that may be flowing *from* a certain attitude towards the environment rather than dictating that attitude, for it appears as the provider of an allegedly objective set of (scientific) criteria, after having subjectively endorsed these criteria. In other words, the aesthetics of separation falls here on its own sword. As Heyd puts it:

The "stories of science" are also deeply cultural since they arise from very particular cultural conditions (as were given in Modern Europe) and serve very specific cultural goals (namely predictive and retrospective explanation). [] The illusion that science is not driven by values, though, can only be upheld by those so deeply involved in its world picture that they lack the capacity for critical scrutiny of what science is. [26]

I did point out at the beginning that science may provide its own model for understanding the environment, but this model is hardly concerned with continuities linking the surrounded and its surroundings or with the duty of care towards our environments and ourselves. It is now obvious that to use this scientific model in order to infer the untenability of such continuities begs the question and is a

lot like eating one's cake and having it, too.

5. An Aesthetics for the Environment

In sum, I have not tried here so much to defend a particular version of what one may call the "aesthetics of repatriation" regarding the environment. With Berleant's project of aesthetic engagement in mind, I have tried to show that, apart from any other merits that may count in its favor, such an aesthetics is congruent with the ecological and humanitarian concerns of our age. *A fortiori*, the opponents of this aesthetics seem to be either oblivious its true content or unable to make sense of the objections it poses for the various aesthetics of separation.

It has to be said, however, that Berleant is not content simply with articulating a new paradigm for aesthetic appreciation. One of his main concerns is to target actively, in turn, what he sees as the Kantian plague of disinterestedness, distance, and objectification in traditional philosophical aesthetics. But the version of aesthetic Kantianism he is attacking is not necessarily the only possible one. The aesthetics of repatriation may be compatible with a particular understanding of disinterestedness that is free from the sin of objectification and, crucially, that can actively support the duty of aesthetic care. Indeed McGhee (among others) has indicated that such an understanding is not only possible but also closer perhaps to Kant's proper intentions. [\[27\]](#) Disinterested pleasure in beauty is not necessarily a pleasure that polarizes the perceiver versus the perceived, even in the absence of any relevant desires on the part of the former. The perceiver does not derive pleasure from the perceived but from the experience of perception *itself* and from the fruitful intuitions the latter may evoke. In this respect, the activity of experiencing aesthetically *is* the pleasure; it presupposes subjects and objects but transcends them, repatriates them back to the common ground that enables them both to be what they are and to support one another.

Carlson again writes:

I may be totally engaged in the sensory qualities of my toothache, indeed they may consume my whole being, and yet this may not, and typically would not, constitute an aesthetic experience. Again, it seems that only something like disinterestedness can make my pain somewhat aesthetically appreciable. [\[28\]](#)

Indeed, let us say that I may aesthetically derive from my toothache intuitions about the fragility of my body, the transient character of delight, and the grim reality of suffering (my own suffering as well as that of others). If this aesthetic attitude towards my toothache is disinterested, how is it so? The disinterestedness of distance says, in effect, that I can take away the pain and keep the experience that was linked to the pain. Therefore, the disinterestedness of distance betrays an aesthetics of separation and hijacks one part of my experience in the name of the whole. On the contrary, what one could now call the disinterestedness of engagement would keep the pain and keep the intuitions it evoked in me. These intuitions *are* my regurgitated pain, and I cannot but care about my pain if I care about the accompanying intuitions; without the pain, the intuitions would have been different. Given the appropriate circumstances in various aesthetic contexts, I may have equally well experienced the fragility of my body,

the transient character of delight, and the grim reality of suffering. But this alternative experience of mine would not have been an experience as having been *bound up* at some moment or other with my toothache. Only the latter experience, and thus only the disinterestedness of engagement, leads back again to that route of repatriation, the route of harmonious living within the homeland of my experienced world from my teeth to the furthest reaches of all environments.^[29]

ENDNOTES

[1] For an interesting account of this kind of "proprioception," that is the aesthetic perception of one's own body, see Barbara Montero, "Proprioception as an Aesthetic Sense," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64 (2006), 231–242.

[2] Plotinus, *Ennead* I 6. 8 (3rd cent. CE). English translation by Stephen MacKenna and B. S. Page. Available online through [classics.mit.edu/\(16/V/2007\)](http://classics.mit.edu/(16/V/2007)).

[3] Throughout, I am taking the need to care for oneself as self-justifying.

[4] See, for instance, Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), and *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

[5] Compare here Richard Shusterman's project of "somaesthetics," or the aesthetics focusing on the living body. (See, e.g., more recently, his "Aesthetic Experience: From Analysis to Eros," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64 (2006), 217–229.)

[6] *The Aesthetics of Environment*, p. 91.

[7] *Op. cit.*, p. 174.

[8] *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

[9] Like Shaftesbury, Addison, Hutcheson, Burke, Gerard, Alison. See Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 20 (1961–62), 131–143.

[10] Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature* (Oxford, etc.: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 111.

[11] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee, 1980 (1934)), p. 212.

[12] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, p. 11.

[13] See G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, in the 1886 translation by B. Bosanquet, with an introduction and commentary by M. Inwood (London, etc.: Penguin, 1993), pp. 3–5.

[14] Peter Lamarque, "Palaeolithic Cave Painting: A Test Case for Transcultural Aesthetics," in *Aesthetics and Rock Art*, ed. by Thomas Heyd & John Clegg (Aldershot, Burlington (VT): Ashgate, 2005), pp. 21–35; ref. on p. 27.

[15] To say that some sort of artistic intentionality is involved in creating art is of course to speak tautologically.

[16] Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture* (London, New

York: Routledge, 2002 (12000)), p. 7.

[17] Allen Carlson, "Critical Notice: Aesthetics and Environment," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 46 (2006), 416–427; ref. on p. 425.

[18] Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, pp. 111–112.

[19] Perhaps Kant's notion of "subjective universality" is relevant. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 6 (1790). English translation by James Creed Meredith (1911). Available online through eserver.org/ (16/V/2007).

[20] See Allen Carlson, "The Aesthetics of Nature" in *Aesthetics and the Environment*, pp. 3–15.

[21] Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment*, p. xix.

[22] From an interview in Lucien Stryk's *Encounter with Zen: Writings on Poetry and Zen* (Ohio, etc.: Ohio University Press, 1981), p. 240.

[23] Cf. his monumental earthwork *Spiral Jetty* (1970, Great Salt Lake in Utah, www.spiraljetty.org).

[24] In fact, their *Over the River* project (for the Arkansas River in the State of Colorado, scheduled for exhibition in July–August 2011) may be quite relevant here. See the artists' website for details: www.christojeanneclaude.net/otr.shtml.

[25] Allen Carlson, "Critical Notice," pp. 426–427.

[26] Thomas Heyd, "Aesthetic Appreciation and the Many Stories about Nature," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 41 (2001), 125–137; ref. on pp. 135–136.

[27] Michael McGhee, "A Fat Worm of Error?" *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 31 (1991), 222–229.

[28] Allen Carlson, "Critical Notice," p. 422.

[29] This paper has greatly benefited from the remarks of an anonymous reviewer for *Contemporary Aesthetics* to whom I would like to express my sincere thanks. An earlier version of the paper was presented at "The Turn to Aesthetics" international conference at Liverpool Hope University (UK), in June 2007. I am also grateful for the useful comments and feedback I received there.

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Published November 20, 2007