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## Things of Beauty: Aesthetics for Environmental Education

Annie Schultz

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THINGS OF BEAUTY:  
AESTHETICS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY  
ANNIE SCHULTZ  
CHICAGO, IL  
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## ABSTRACT

As environmental crisis looms large, most agree that human reeducation is necessary in order to improve our relationship to the natural environment. Yet, there is currently no comprehensive interdisciplinary philosophy of education for environmental awareness. While there is writing in the field of philosophy of education on ecologizing education and literature which draws connections between aesthetic education and the appreciation of nature, there is little literature on the explicit ways in which aesthetic and art education can inform environmental justice initiatives.

This dissertation examines aesthetic and art education's relationship to the environment and how aesthetics can inform a moral relationship to the natural environment and nonhuman others. To do this, I examine theories of aesthetic education broadly and Kantian aesthetic judgment specifically, as well as scholarship and art forms that bring the arts and environmentalism together through the lens of educational theory. This dissertation employs philosophy of education as its primary framework but also includes analysis of aesthetic and art theory, as well as sociological analyses of the visual experience.

I argue that in order to have a moral relationship with the nonhuman world, aesthetic sensibility ought to inform an education for environmental consciousness. Ultimately, this project brings the fields of humanities and aesthetic education into a co-contributing relationship with environmental education. This work aims to enlarge the discipline of educational theory to include study of human society's relationship to the nonhuman world and to reimagine the connections between aesthetics and environmental education.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the American transcendentalists a century after him, and John Dewey at the turn of the next century, all prioritized experiences in and with nature in education and theorized on how humans ought to experience nature.<sup>1</sup> Each of these thinkers posed moral questions about how society ought to respond to industrialization, urbanization, and how humanist sciences related to and regarded the natural world. Given the rapid expansion of human infrastructure over the past two centuries and increasing exploitation of nonhuman others and spaces, what kind of education has the power to change attitudes toward the nonhuman? What educational tools at our disposal could cultivate a moral orientation to the nonhuman? Is the beauty of nature enough to inspire human society to preserve and protect it? Do experiences of natural beauty inspire moral thinking? Friedrich Schiller, in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, was also thinking about the relationship between the experience of natural beauty and human morality. He claimed that the development of aesthetic taste frees persons from social and material dependencies, as well as aids in the recognition and regard for the freedom of others.<sup>2</sup> Thinkers continue to take up these questions about human morality and experiences of nonhuman beauty in an outward other-oriented conception of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. & ed. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979); Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson: Selected Journals 1841-1877*, ed. Lawrence Rosenwald (New York: Library of American, 2010), entry for September 14, 1839; John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Free press, 1938).

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Keith Tribe, ed. Alexander Schmidt (1795; repr., New York: Penguin, 2016).

Elaine Scarry, responding to both Immanuel Kant and Schiller in her book *On Beauty and Being Just*, explains that “the endless small adjustments of balance” one makes when walking through the world are affected by the shifting perspectival weight one gives to beautiful things.<sup>3</sup> What power might beauty have to cultivate attitudes of respect and reciprocity toward the nonhuman.

This dissertation focuses on the use of aesthetics in an education for environmental consciousness to cultivate moral attitudes toward the nonhuman. I argue that a scientific understanding of the nonhuman alone is not enough to shift attitudes. I suggest aesthetic and art education as helpful educational paradigms for environmental consciousness. I turn to philosophy of education broadly and aesthetic philosophy specifically in this project because the human moral relationship to the nonhuman is not one that can be explained by empirical modes of knowledge alone. I turn to aesthetic philosophy because aesthetics inquire into the ways we experience and relate to our surroundings; not just how we understand them empirically, but how we experience them attitudinally. While scientific knowledge is vital to understanding the depths and reach of human-caused environmental degradation, understanding isn’t enough. A shift ought to occur at the very root of the human experience of the nonhuman in order for widespread change in the human treatment of nonhuman others and spaces to occur. Nonhuman spaces and others ought to be reconceptualized as entities worthy of respect, appreciation, and generosity *in themselves* rather than objects of utility.

I also argue that beauty, as a particular realm of aesthetics, is helpful for moral thinking and that experiences of beauty in nature inspire an attitude of esteemed regard. To make this argument, I turn to the Kantian beauty experience as laid out in *Critique of Judgement*: Kant claims the sensitivity required for experiencing beauty “makes the soul fitted for virtuous impulses.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Kant treats nature as the paradigm object of experiences of beauty. I put Kant’s aesthetics in conversation with philosophers of environment and philosophers of education to think through the ways beauty inspires a moral orientation to the nonhuman. In addition to beauty, I argue as well for art appreciation as an ally for environmental

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<sup>3</sup> Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 230.

education. Arts-based education has a unique potential to inspire an attitude of appreciation, respect, and compassion for the nonhuman world. I suggest perceiving nonhuman nature aesthetically — as art — inspires deep moral appreciation that is not dependent on purpose or instrumentality.

In sum, three argumentative threads run throughout this dissertation: (1) that aesthetics is a useful area for cultivating an environmental sensibility in education; (2) that beauty as a particular realm of aesthetics is useful to environmental education; and (3) that art appreciation as an educational paradigm is useful toward cultivating an environmental sensibility. Next, I discuss each of these threads in turn and how they function in the chapters that follow.

### **Why Aesthetics for Environment in Education?**

Educational theorists have explored how the nonhuman shows up in educational practice in a variety of capacities, both material and conceptual.<sup>5</sup> In this dissertation, I argue specifically for an *aesthetics* of environment in education because of the power of aesthetic viewing and judgement to shape attitudes and relationality. In this section, I first provide a background on some of the work being done in educational theory which takes up the issue of the human relationship to the nonhuman, then I turn to the accounts of philosophers of environment who investigate the relationship between aesthetics and environmental consciousness, bringing these ideas into conversation with philosophy of education.

There are several theoretical approaches to human-nonhuman relationships in education: environmental and ecological education, sustainability education, ecojustice education, critical animal studies, and animal ethics are but a few.

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<sup>5</sup> J. Andrzejewsky, M. Baltodano, and L. Symcox, *Social Justice, Peace, and Environmental Education* (New York: Routledge, 2009); A. C. Bell and C.L. Russell, “Beyond Human, Beyond Words: Anthropocentrism, Critical Pedagogy and the Poststructuralist Turn,” *Canadian Journal of Education* 25, no. 3 (2000): 188-203; C. A. Bowers, *Educating for Ecojustice and Community* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Rebecca Martusewicz, Jeff Edmundson, and John Lupinacci, *Ecojustice Education: Toward Diverse, Democratic, and Sustainable Communities* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Helena Pederson, *Animals in Schools: Processes and Strategies in Human-Animal Education* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2010); Suzanne Rice and A. G. Rud, eds. *The educational significance of human and non-human animal interactions: Blurring the species line* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Bradley Rowe, “Food, habit, and the consumption of animals as educational encounter,” *Philosophy of Education* (2012): 210-218; Rita Turner, *Teaching for Ecojustice: Curriculum and Lessons for Secondary and College Classrooms* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Educational theorists working under the broad umbrella of environmental and ecological education study the ways in which students confront nonhuman others directly, as in a dissection exercise in a science class,<sup>6</sup> or enter the natural environments of nonhuman others, as in the attempts at multispecies learning.<sup>7</sup> Sustainability education, on the other hand, is an activism-driven pedagogy which encourages students to seek concrete solutions to problems and may focus on large systemic issues such as population growth and production and consumption practices.<sup>8</sup> Ecojustice education, in a similar yet distinct way, aims to impart a sense of awareness of our interrelationships to the nonhuman but does so using the resources of a humanities-based education. Ecojustice educational theorists are interested in how students and educators conceive of nonhuman others culturally and metaphorically. For example, Rita Turner, in *Teaching for EcoJustice*, advocates for using education to illuminate the connections and interrelations of human problems and actions with those of the nonhuman toward ecojustice. According to Turner, the humanities are invaluable for understanding how art and culture influence our thinking about the nonhuman world and its connection to our human relationalities.<sup>9</sup> Educational theorists have noted that environmental and ecological awareness must not be confined to the social science and STEM subjects. Environmental awareness ought to find a home in art-based education because the environmental crisis is a *cultural* crisis: a crisis of values and attitudes. Therefore, the values that we place on the nonhuman — nonhuman animals, stones, mountains, glaciers, forests, landscapes— ought to be valued apart from human instrumentality. In order for this attitude to take shape, it must be woven into our culture: our ways of thinking. One way in which we teach culture is in visual arts. In fact, thinkers concerned with the human relationship to the nonhuman have advocated for a moving away from scientific and empirical modes of knowledge production with regard to

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<sup>6</sup> D. Solot & A. Arluke, “Learning the Scientist’s Role: Animal Dissection in Middle School,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 26, no. 1 (1997): 28–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124197026001002>.

<sup>7</sup> A. Taylor & V. Pacini-Ketchabaw, “Learning with children, ants, and worms in the Anthropocene,” *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 23, no. 4 (2015): 507–529.

<sup>8</sup> H. Kopnina, “Sustainability in environmental education: New strategic thinking,” *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 17, no. 5 (2015): 987–1002.

<sup>9</sup> Turner, *Teaching for EcoJustice*.

human/nonhuman relationalities.<sup>10</sup> For example, Ramsay Affifi argues that an understanding of beauty can be the basis of concrete situations in schools. Students can have aesthetic experiences in unexpected instances. Some examples Affifi provides: “Phytoplankton photosynthesis no longer seems remote and dry when one’s beloved whales depend on them. The Calvin cycle may finally take on some urgency when one learns its critical enzymes can be disrupted by heavy metal pollution ... Melville can help the budding biologist love his whales. Mycorrhizal symbiosis might point a way forward for supporting a hurting friend.”<sup>11</sup> Aesthetic education need not be a one-way street: the art and literature of humanities subjects can embolden environmental initiatives in the sciences.

Educational theorists working in the areas of ecojustice are increasingly turning to the humanities as a site of environmental and ecological learning. For example, Turner, in *Teaching for EcoJustice*, has highlighted the importance of “studying text, language, and culture for ecojustice.”<sup>12</sup> Relatedly, philosophers of education have pointed out that the ecological crisis is in fact a *cultural* crisis.<sup>13</sup> While the sciences might seem the obvious home for environmental education, the humanities have much to offer in the way of dislodging anthropocentrism at the education stage. Helena Pederson has similarly argued that critical animal studies in educational research, for example, often manifests in not only social and natural sciences, but theoretical humanities programs as well.<sup>14</sup>

In critical animal studies and animal ethics education, educators take an ethics-based approach to studying human-nonhuman interactions and rely on the well-established theories of Aldo Leopold’s land ethic

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<sup>10</sup> Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (New Orleans, LA: Pelican Books, 2018); Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Ramsay Affifi, “Beauty in the Darkness: Aesthetic Education in the Ecological Crisis,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54, no. 4 (2020): 1132.”

<sup>12</sup> Turner, *Teaching for EcoJustice*, xix.

<sup>13</sup> Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci, *Ecojustice Education*; Jane Roland Martin, “Renouncing Human Hubris and Reeducating Commonsense,” *Studies in Philosophy of Education* 36 (2017): 283-298; Turner, *Teaching for EcoJustice*.

<sup>14</sup> Pederson, *Animals in Schools*.

and Arne Naess's deep ecology,<sup>15</sup> as well as Peter Singer's, Tom Regan's, and Martha Nussbaum's extension of ethics to nonhuman animals.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in *The Educational Significance of Human and Non-human Animal Interactions*, Suzanne Rice and A. G. Rud point out that educational theorists are becoming increasingly interested in how these human-nonhuman interactions are educational, matter beyond material encounters, and seep into students' cultural understandings of agency, oppression, power, and intersectionality. Moreover, a 2017 special issue of *Studies in Philosophy and Education* titled "Ecologizing Philosophy of Education" foregrounds the ecological crisis in educational theory.<sup>17</sup>

Adding another angle to the conversation on human-nonhuman relationships in education, I'm interested in this dissertation in the values and attitudes cultivated through aesthetic experiences among nonhuman environments and the attitudinal shifts possible through sensual and artful experiences in nature. To be sure, the attitudinal shift I have in mind is from a view of nonhuman spaces and beings as instrumental to a view of the nonhuman as valuable *in itself* and worthy of esteemed regard. Though I explore an aesthetics of the nonhuman in this project, my argument is also concerned with both morality and ethics. Ethical and aesthetic concerns, while distinct from each other, also inform one another. According to Arnold Berleant, the aesthetic, with its "directly perceptual character," allows an observer to experience the values inherent in the environment.<sup>18</sup> I view an aesthetics of environment in education as a way forward for more ethical treatment of the nonhuman. Aesthetic judgements inspire a valuing of the other that is not based on purpose or use, but is an inherent value.

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<sup>15</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949); Arne Naess, "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary," *Inquiry* 16, no. 1–4 (January 1973): 95–100. doi:10.1080/00201747308601682.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation, 2nd Edition* (London: Pimlico, 1995); Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Ramsay Affifi, Sean Blenkinsop, C. Humphreys & Clarence Joldersma, "Introduction to Ecologizing Philosophy of Education," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 36, no.3 (2017): 229–241, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11217-017-9574-3>.

<sup>18</sup> Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 4, 11.

My argument for an aesthetics of environment in education will contribute to an ongoing conversation on the intersection of aesthetics and environmental studies in education.<sup>19</sup> For example, Albert William Levi traces nature as teacher back to Plato's the *Phaedrus* through to the Industrial Revolution, the Romantic period, and John Dewey's naturalistic humanism.<sup>20</sup> Yuriko Saito supports an aesthetic education concerning nature which incorporates "the contributions made by scientists and naturalists so that our attitude toward nature will develop with ecological sensitivity."<sup>21</sup> David Carr has argued that the outdoor environment is "significant for education in general and moral education in particular," supporting an "intrinsic appreciation of nature and the outdoors ... which explores an alternative strategy focused on exposure to the arts."<sup>22</sup> My aesthetics of environment will add to this conversation the contribution of a particular attention to beauty and art appreciation. I find most support in this exploration of an aesthetics of environment for education in Arnold Berleant's and Emily Brady's aesthetics for the natural environment.

A robust environmental consciousness ought to move beyond science-based disciplines and include study of aesthetics broadly and art in particular. Arnold Berleant, in his book *Living in the Landscape*, observes that "scholars and researchers are ... coming to recognize the interdisciplinary nature of environmental aesthetics," and "an awareness of the aesthetic aspect of environment has begun to permeate disciplines as diverse as geography, psychology, art history, anthropology, and philosophy."<sup>23</sup> Berleant additionally points out that an aesthetic value of the natural environment "is an important compliment to other areas of research such as ethics, preservation, sustainable development, and resource management."<sup>24</sup> An awareness of

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<sup>19</sup> Albert William Levi, "Nature and Art," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 18, no. 3 (1984): 5-21; Yuriko Saito, "Is There a Correct Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature?" *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 18, no. 4 (1984): 35-46; David Carr, "Moral Values and the Arts in Environmental Education: Towards an Ethics of Aesthetic Appreciation," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 38, no. 2 (2004): 221-39.

<sup>20</sup> Levi, "Nature and Art," 6-8.

<sup>21</sup> Saito, "Is there a Correct Aesthetics Appreciation of Nature?" 36.

<sup>22</sup> Carr, "Moral Values and the Arts in Environmental Education," 221.

<sup>23</sup> Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Berleant, 3.

environment requires more than fact-based understanding. An environmental consciousness requires a view of environment as intrinsically worthy of appreciation.

At this point, how I use the term ‘environment’ in this project needs explanation. I view the nonhuman environment as every thing and being that surrounds us which might be referred to as ‘nature,’ with an attention to the fact that human beings are part and parcel of nature. Arnold Berleant’s definition of environment informs the way I discuss the nonhuman world throughout this dissertation. According to Berleant, “Environment is more than simply our external surroundings.” Further, “human life is intimately bound to environmental conditions and ... no sharp line divides us from the environment we inhabit. As we breath in the air around us with all its pollutants and absorb it into the bloodstream, it becomes a part of our bodies.”<sup>25</sup> For Berleant, “inside and outside, consciousness and world, human being and natural processes are not pairs of opposites but aspects of the same thing ...”<sup>26</sup> Similarly and more recently, Morwenna Griffiths, writing specifically on the ways education might be more attentive to the more-than-human, observes that nature does not recognize the boundaries of the walls of our houses, buildings, and classrooms any more than the those of our own bodies: nature is “indoors, outdoors, and both; of our bodies, in our bodies and beyond them.”<sup>27</sup> I discuss Griffiths’ proposal for an education which disrupts the sharp demarcations between the “natural” and “unnatural” in chapter five. Also similarly, philosopher Timothy Morton has argued for an “ecology without nature,” in which there is no ‘out-there’ or ‘over-there’ nature. Instead, argues Morton, “the very idea of nature ... will have to wither away in an ecological state of human society” and that “the idea of nature is getting in the way of properly ecological forms of culture, politics, philosophy, and art.”<sup>28</sup>

Although I agree with Berleant, Griffiths, and Morton that there are no clear lines between nature and culture or the human and the nonhuman, I do refer to a “nonhuman world” or “nonhuman nature”

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<sup>25</sup> Berleant, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Berleant, 11-12.

<sup>27</sup> Morwenna Griffiths, “Educational Relationships: Rousseau, Wollstonecraft and Social Justice,” *Journal of Philosophy Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 339.

<sup>28</sup> Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.



throughout this dissertation. The reason I retain an idea of “nature” in this way is because, while humans both act on and are acted upon by the nonhuman, human agency and technology differs significantly from the agency and processes of the nonhuman: namely, nonhuman nature mostly works in symbiotic and reciprocal cycles which preserve the life of ecosystems, whereas human behavior and technology works to conserve the human lifestyle exclusively, with little regard for other lifeforms and systems. For the purposes of thinking through the ways in which an aesthetics of environment can inform a moral orientation to the nonhuman world, I find it useful to retain this distinction to an extent. That being said, I do find Berleant’s characterization of environment as a system of which humans are actively a part, impacting it as it impacts us, not only in material ways but ways that “color our temperament and attitudes” to be helpful.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Berleant’s understanding that people participate actively in environment and are not only passive observers of it is an important departure from how the ancients and Kant thought about the human relationship to nature. I discuss the philosophical history of human aesthetic contemplation of nature in the following chapter.

Though the human and nonhuman worlds collide and shape one another, the nonhuman world — or ‘nature’ — is distinct in important ways, not least of which that it exists whether humans are around or not. An environmental consciousness depends on the subject not slipping into a view of the nonhuman as culturally constructed or dependent on human consciousness. Along the same lines, Emily Brady, in *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, writes that “pinning down the differences between the natural and the unnatural, nature and culture ... is a difficult task:”

Perhaps the best approach is to sketch out two answers that lie at two ends of a wide spectrum. On one end is the holistic, ecological position that views nature as real and humans as part of nature rather than separate from it ... The view that nature is not real, but rather a cultural construct, lies at the other end. Everything is cultural, and so humans are exclusively cultural beings, rather than part of nature ... [a view] rooted to a great extent in postmodern theory.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 52-53.

My thinking on the nature/culture and human/nonhuman binary is most allied with Brady's, which is the position of somewhere in between the view that "the natural world exists independently of human perception and culture, so it is not entirely ... a cultural construct" and that "our relationship to nature is characterised by both continuity and difference. We are part of nature, but nature is also other than human, and our idea of nature is shaped by human concepts and cultural conventions."<sup>31</sup> Though our *ideas* of nature may be shaped by cultural conventions, it's important to keep in mind that the nonhuman is *not* a cultural construct. An aesthetics of environment will depend on a view of the nonhuman as both *existing* and *valuable* apart from human enterprises.

Another way in which an aesthetics of environment in education will differ from a science-based understanding of environment is that aesthetics, beauty, and art are all related to issues of subjectivity and objectivity. But I argue in this dissertation that objective versus subjective viewing are not the issues they seem to be for an aesthetics of environment. Brady's *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* is helpful here too. Brady troubles the idea that scientific values of the natural environment are less prone to subjectivity than aesthetic values of the environment, and are therefore the more useful type of value, and also that, because of the association between aesthetics and pleasure, aesthetic viewing of nature is instrumental. Brady sees both of these ideas as mistaken.<sup>32</sup> According to Brady, these misconceptions may "explain why some environmental philosophers and activists perceive aesthetic value as the 'icing on the cake,' a frivolous value that has less importance and urgency in relation to conserving the environment compared to ecological or moral values."

In order to problematize the claim that an aesthetics of environment is dependent on subjectivity, Brady draws on the Kantian distinction of interested and disinterested pleasure (I discuss Kant's aesthetics in the following section). According to Brady, while the pleasure experienced in recreation or relaxation in the natural environment is interested (rooted in utility), "in aesthetic appreciation, pleasure does not play a

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<sup>31</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 53.

<sup>32</sup> Brady, 22.

motivational role but rather it is merely a by-product of the experience.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, an aesthetic appreciation of nature is disinterested (not rooted in utility), and an aesthetic experience of the natural environment is an end in itself. Moreover, the aesthetic *appreciation* of the natural environment is an end in itself. The aim of an aesthetics of environment, says Brady, “is to enhance appreciation by expanding our ways of relating to different environments, but without trivialising or appropriating them.”<sup>34</sup> While the aim of a science-based exploration of nature is knowledge and understanding based on full scientific explanations, the point of “making sense” in an aesthetic context “is about trying out different ways of seeing aesthetic qualities, trying out different perspectives, as part of an exploration of nature and its qualities.”<sup>35</sup> A “perceptual and imaginative awareness ... of the aesthetic value in nature” helps in the adoption of an attitude of respect, according to Brady.<sup>36</sup> Rather than conferring scientific names and taxonomies onto the natural environment, as in a scientific understanding, an aesthetic understanding asks us to understand nature on its own terms by experiencing its qualities with our senses. This kind of experience, says Brady, “raises new questions and throws new light upon concepts like diversity, rarity and, perhaps most of all, morality.”<sup>37</sup> With regard to morality, the disinterested quality of aesthetic appreciation is key to separating an experience of nature from human amenity and utility in order to cultivate an appreciation of nature as an end in itself.

Before concluding this section, I want to reiterate the definition of “natural environment” that I turn to in this dissertation and define one other term: ecoaesthetic.

I tend in this dissertation to use the terms “environment,” “environmental education,” and “environmental thinking” in place of “ecology,” “ecological education,” and “ecological thinking.” The reason for this is because experiencing the nonhuman in an aesthetic way does necessarily mean experiencing

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<sup>33</sup> Brady, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Brady, 81.

<sup>35</sup> Brady, 81.

<sup>36</sup> Brady, 219.

<sup>37</sup> Brady, 128.

it at a slight distance. If a disinterested respect for nature is key to a morally oriented aesthetics of environment, which I think it is, then it is important to think about nonhuman nature as an *environment* that, though we are a part of it, ultimately *environs us*; meaning that it is more than and beyond the human being. Ecological thinking, on the other hand, tends to prioritize an understanding of our relationships to the nonhuman rather than an aesthetic experience of it. While I recognize how critical an understanding of our ecological relationship to the nonhuman is and do discuss it at various points in this dissertation, the bulk of my discussion will consider nonhuman nature as environment.

That being said, I do find Allen Carlson's term *ecoaesthetic* to be helpful in formulating an explanation of an aesthetics for environmental education.<sup>38</sup> An ecoaesthetic is the answer to the challenge of joining an environmental ethics with an environmental aesthetic: a connection between how we aesthetically appreciate our environments and how we should treat them. An aspect of aesthetics that I think helps make clear the moral significance of aesthetic appreciation is the Kantian beauty experience, which I turn to next.

### Beauty

Experiences of beauty are useful educational tools toward a moral environmental sensibility. As persistently as human society tries to distance itself from nature — physically, psychologically, temporally — by way of technological advancements and ever-expanding infrastructure, we remain fascinated by its beauty and crave closeness to untouched spaces. Much has been written on the importance of art and aesthetics in education,<sup>39</sup> and there is a substantial body of literature on ecological and environmental education,<sup>40</sup> some of

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<sup>38</sup> Allen Carlson, "Environmental Aesthetics, Ethics, and Ecoaesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76, no. 4 (2018): 399-410.

<sup>39</sup> Elliot Eisner, "What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education?" Originally given as the John Dewey Lecture for 2002, Stanford University, reprinted here: <https://infed.org/mobi/what-can-education-learn-from-the-arts-about-the-practice-of-education/>; Maxine Greene, "Literature in Aesthetic Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 10, no. 3/4 (1976): 61-76; Claudia Ruitenberg, "Art as Alterity in Education," *Educational Theory* 64, no. 3 (2014): 247; Daniel Broden, "Acknowledging Ambivalence in Teaching About Arts and Aesthetics," *Educational Theory* 70, no. 1 (2020): 561-585; Kazuyo Nakamura, "The Significance of Dewey's Aesthetics in Art Education in the Age of Globalization," *Educational Theory* 59, no. 4 (2006): 427-440; Claudia Ruitenberg, "Living with Art," *Philosophy of Education* (2002): 452-640; David Carr, "Dangerous Knowledge: On the Epistemic and Moral Significance of Arts in Education," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 3 (2010): 1-15; Dorit Barchana-Lorand & Elfrat Galnoor, "Philosophy of Art Education in the Visual Culture: Aesthetics for Art Teachers," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. 1 (2009): 133-148; Tracie E. Costantino, "Training Aesthetic Perception: John Dewey on the Educational Role of Art Museums," *Educational Theory* 54, no. 4 (2004): 399-417.

<sup>40</sup> Andrzejewsky, Baltodano, & Symcox, *Social Justice, Peace, and Environmental Education*; Bell & Russell, "Beyond Human, Beyond Words; Bowers, *Educating for Ecojustice and Community*; Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, *Ecojustice Education*; Pederson, *Animals in*

which addresses issues of beauty and aesthetics in nature.<sup>41</sup> Aldo Leopold, envisioning a land ethic, makes the good point that “actions and attitudes” toward the nonhuman world are often “determined by the land users’ tastes and predilections.”<sup>42</sup> Attitude and sensibilities are integral to an ethical framework which includes the nonhuman world, as our *sensual* experiences of it are the most acute of all experience. Moreover, according to Leopold, an ethical framework is right not only when “it tends to preserve the integrity [and] stability ... of the biotic community,” but also when it tends to preserve its *beauty*.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, there is not a comprehensive aesthetics of environment in educational theory which looks to beauty as a particular perceptual frame.

I turn to the Kantian conception of beauty throughout this dissertation because Kant’s conception of aesthetic judgment can be understood as an *experience*, rather than only a quality. Treating beauty as an experience is useful for the cultivation of an environmental sensibility because in experiencing the nonhuman as aesthetic, we experience the moral power of appreciation. Moreover, Kant treats nature as the paradigm object of experiences of beauty. According to philosopher of education Pradeep Dhillon, “much of our contemporary philosophical interest in environmental aesthetics could turn to Kant, with some profit.”<sup>44</sup> In what follows, I outline Kant’s aesthetics as he relates them *Critique of Judgement*.

In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant sought to demonstrate how the human experience of the beautiful and the sublime, especially in nature, are kindred to the freedom and disinterestedness human beings ought to exhibit in their moral judgments. As in all three of his critiques, in the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant is trying to reconcile human freedom with nature, or “the sum total of all objects of experience.”<sup>45</sup> The basis for this

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*Schools*; Rice & Rud, *The educational significance of human and non-human animal interactions*; Rowe, “Food, habit, and the consumption of animals as educational encounter; Turner, *Teaching for EcoJustice*.

<sup>41</sup> Affifi, “Beauty in the Darkness;” Angelo Caranfa, “Contemplative Instruction and the Gifts of Beauty, Love, and Silence,” *Educational Theory* 60, no. 5 (2010); 561.

<sup>42</sup> Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 48.

<sup>43</sup> Leopold, 48.

<sup>44</sup> Pradeep Dhillon, *A companion to aesthetics*, eds. Davies, S., Higgins, K. M., Hopkins, R., Stecker, R., & Cooper, D. E. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 397.

kind of thinking for Kant are the different powers of the mind: understanding, judgement, and reason. His concern in this critique is the cognitive power of judgement: “the ability to subsume the particular under the universal.”<sup>46</sup> Judgement, Kant theorizes, is the mediator between nature and human freedom. It is in the power of judgment, says Kant, that we can find the a priori principle of pleasure to be had in perceiving nature. This kind of judgement Kant calls *reflective* judgement, which, like determining judgement, has a primary partner in understanding.<sup>47</sup> Though reflective judgements at first appear to be subjective because of their involvement with pleasure, Kant draws a distinction between pleasure derived from sensual gratifications (the agreeable) and that derived from reflective judgement. He recognized a type of pleasure that is not the result of satisfaction of a desire, but a pleasure that is free from both sensuous and intellectual gratification. This pleasure is that which is usually had in the midst of beauty (especially in nature), or, in the case of the sublime, when in the presence of something awe-inspiring. Therefore, judgments of beauty are disinterested in Kant’s framework.

For Kant, experiences of beauty are non-cognitive (the mind does not draw on any associations outside of the experience) and disinterested (non-instrumental). Therefore, the object of the judgement of beauty holds a uniquely moral position in the consciousness of the observer because the observer likes and takes pleasure in the object for its own sake. Emily Brady argues that non-instrumental value “is an important environmental value because it captures an immediate, common and distinctive way in which we appreciate our surroundings;”<sup>48</sup> further, “it achieves this by showing how aesthetic valuing can be conceived in a way that backgrounds personal preferences and utilitarian concerns in our approach to nature, and foregrounds an appreciation of its qualities.”<sup>49</sup> I argue that Kantian disinterestedness is helpful toward and environmental

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<sup>46</sup> Kant, 391.

<sup>47</sup> Kant, 404.

<sup>48</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics for the Natural Environment*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Brady, 129.

consciousness which is other-oriented: the viewer experiences and appreciates the being or space judged beautiful for its own sake, outside of utility.

Moreover, and related to a valuing of the nonhuman as existing apart from human consciousness, the experience of beauty is one which seems to take place outside of the self. In his book *All Art is Ecological*, Timothy Morton describes the Kantian beauty experience as something that “just happens, without our ego cooking it up. The experience of beauty itself is an entity that isn’t ‘me.’”<sup>50</sup> In other words, experiences of beauty are other-oriented. An appreciation that is not reduced to amenity, consumption, purpose, or even desire, is a conception that is consistent with a moral stance: “it satisfies an end according to duty (Kant’s ‘moral law’).” Moreover, says Brady, “if the environment is something we ought to protect, then we are required to adopt a moral attitude towards it. If this is accepted, then it follows that we should seek a conception of aesthetic value that is consistent with this stance.”<sup>51</sup>

I also find Kant’s notion of a lawful purposiveness in the beauty of nature helpful in establishing the connection between experiences of beauty and moral thinking. Kant thought experiences of beauty were analogous to moral thinking because of the purposive lawfulness of beauty in nature.<sup>52</sup> J.H. Kupfer observes that what seems especially pleasurable about aesthetic objects “is that they are complete in themselves. The sense of wholeness conveyed seems to suggest that we are in a self-contained realm in which every part has a necessary place. This sort of completeness answers the complementary and often competing demands of economy and adequacy.”<sup>53</sup> Because objects of aesthetic judgements are freed from issues of utility or functionality, the reciprocity (a term Kupfer uses, which I take to be interchangeable with Kant’s purposive

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<sup>50</sup> Timothy Morton, *All Art is Ecological* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 50.

<sup>51</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics for the Natural Environment*, 129.

<sup>52</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 337.

<sup>53</sup> J. H. Kupfer, “Aesthetics Experience as Moral Education,” in *Experience as Art: Aesthetics in Everyday Life* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1983), 68.

lawfulness) among the parts of the aesthetic object constitute a “relation rather than ... simply a means to some extrinsic end.”<sup>54</sup>For example,

In a useful object, determining whether or not the parts are reciprocally related in an adequate way depend upon whether, when so related, the whole fulfills a function external to it: whether the car transports, the gun shoots straight, or the typewriter prints accurately. The existence and appreciation of such useful or mechanical reciprocity, therefore, is determined extrinsically, by a purpose independent of the object. But an aesthetic object, including its parts and relations, exists only for its own sake, not to fulfill some extrinsic function. The success of the reciprocity of an aesthetic object, therefore, is determined from within, by the degree to which its parts form a community, complete and (consequently) valuable in its self.<sup>55</sup>

Kupfer’s explanation of the intrinsic reciprocity of aesthetic objects resembles Kant’s explanation of the moral teleology and purposive lawfulness apparent in nature. For Kant, an aspect of the formal beauty found in nature is that “everything is a purpose and reciprocally also a means ... nothing is gratuitous, purposeless.”<sup>56</sup> For Kant, a judgement of beauty is a judgement of an “intrinsic form” and is different than a judgement of utility;<sup>57</sup> this is why experiences of beauty are uniquely associated with moral judgements for Kant. The subjective purposiveness of beings and processes in nature appear to our judgement to form a closed system which is perfectly reciprocal, lawful, and fair. According to Kant, when we glimpse such a natural process, we experience beauty because of the apparent order and harmony in these processes. Further, we also then want to be reciprocal, lawful and fair ourselves.

In order to establish how experiencing the harmony and lawfulness in nature’s processes can inspire moral treatment, I turn to Elaine Scarry, who takes up this argument in *On Beauty and Being Just*. Scarry refers to the *symmetry* in the intrinsic purposiveness of objects of aesthetic judgements and also symmetry as historically associated with beauty. Symmetry, as Scarry points out, is a quality that has been “most steadily

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<sup>54</sup> Kupfer, “Aesthetic Experience as Moral Education,” 70.

<sup>55</sup> Kupfer, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 376.

<sup>57</sup> Kant, 378-379.



singled out over centuries” of inquiries into the beautiful.<sup>58</sup> Symmetry is an important attribute for fairness, too, in the sense that symmetry in distribution of goods and attention is what leads to fairness.

Scarry, likewise to Kant’s explanation of beauty, points to reciprocity as an aspect of the beauty experience. She connects experiences of beauty to furthering justice because of the “lifesaving reciprocity” associated with beauty. The cognitive event of the beauty experience is such that both entities on either side of perception (subject and object of the judgement of beauty) “affirm the equality of aliveness” of one another.<sup>59</sup>

Beauty is, then, a compact, or contract between the beautiful being (a person or thing) and the perceiver. As the beautiful being confers on the perceiver the gift of life, so the perceiver confers on the beautiful being the gift of life ... This begins within the confined circumference of beholder and beheld who exchange a reciprocal salute to the continuation of one another’s existence; this two-member salute becomes ... dispersed out so that what is achieved is an inclusive affirmation of the ongoingness of existence, and of one’s own responsibility for the continuity of existence.<sup>60</sup>

Scarry uses this reciprocal salute as an analogy of justice and argues that beauty, as an idea and experience, is useful for justice-based thinking. I turn to Scarry’s argument throughout this dissertation and extend this idea to the nonhuman environment and to an arts-based education for environmental awareness which uses beauty as a perceptual frame.

Some might argue that aesthetic beauty is too gauzy a concept to be incorporated into formal education. In fact, Scarry’s main project in *On Beauty* is to rescue beauty from its banishment from humanities education. Scarry claims that contrary to the main political complaint against beauty — that it interferes with the work of addressing injustice — that beauty in fact assists in bringing about justice in the world. Scarry observes that while institutions of education “can seem tonally out of register with beauty,” by working to perpetuate beauty, even in unlikely contexts “institutions of education help insight the will toward continual

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<sup>58</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 96.

<sup>59</sup> Scarry, 92. I say entities here because, for Scarry, it makes no difference what the beings judged as beautiful are — human, animal, plant — or even if they’re animate: “Beauty seems to place requirements on us for attending to the aliveness or (in the case of objects) quasi-aliveness of our world, and for entering into its protection” (p. 90).

<sup>60</sup> Scarry, 90, 92.

creation.”<sup>61</sup> Says Scarry, a “willingness to continually revise one’s own location in order to place oneself in the path of beauty is the basic impulse underlying education:”

One submits oneself in the path of beauty to other minds (teachers) in order to increase the chance that one will be looking in the right direction when a comet makes its sweep through a certain patch of sky. The arts and sciences, like Plato’s dialogues . . . are a key mechanism in what Diotima called begetting and what Tocqueville called distribution.<sup>62</sup>

Scarry draws a connection between the generative quality of beauty — the desire beauty incites to always make more and more of it — and fairness of distribution characteristic of western theories of justice. I discuss this connection in chapter five.

Ultimately, I take beauty to be a useful perceptual frame for an education for a moral orientation to the nonhuman environment. I outline a philosophical history of aesthetics and beauty generally, and Kant’s aesthetics in particular, in the following chapter. I argue that, though there are some problems with Kant’s aesthetics to justice-based thinking, his aesthetics is nevertheless helpful for moral thinking inspired by the beauty experience.

### **Art Appreciation and the Environment**

In this dissertation, I explore the ways in which experiencing nature and the nonhuman as art is helpful toward an environmental awareness. Although the sciences seem the obvious home for environmental education, I argue in this dissertation that arts-based education has a unique potential to inspire an attitude of appreciation, respect, and compassion for the nonhuman world; as many have pointed out, art education is uniquely suited to cultivating such attitudes.<sup>63</sup> The convergence of art, aesthetics, visuality, and education is a widely discussed area among philosophers of education. Elliot Eisner argues the thinking art inspires is necessary to the project of education writ large.<sup>64</sup> Maxine Greene has long argued that academic

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<sup>61</sup> Scarry, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Scarry, 7-8.

<sup>63</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 1934); Eisner, “What Education Can Learn From the Arts;” Ruitenberg, “Art as Alterity” and “Living with Art.”

<sup>64</sup> Eisner, “What can education learn from the arts.”

disciplines themselves be attended to as art forms.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Claudia Ruitenberg argues that art impacts students' development as human beings and offers new ways of inhabiting the world.<sup>66</sup> I bring these ideas into conversation with environmental aesthetics to illustrate the role that art education can play in educating for environmental consciousness.

Philosophers of environment have pointed to the relationship between art appreciation and environmental awareness. Arnold Berleant writes that “environmental awareness has ... expanded to include the realms of imagination and art,” and that “this awareness is not only a sign of a maturing sense of environment but also a recognition that the directness and immediacy of environmental experience have aesthetic character.”<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Timothy Morton in *All Art is Ecological*, explains that environmental thinking has something important in common with “good old-fashioned art appreciation theory:” thinking about wholes and their relationship to parts. Morton points out that the main difference between the environmental approach to ecological consciousness and the animal rights approach is that the former “could be described as taking care of the whole at the expense of individuals,” while the latter “could be described as taking care of individuals at the expense of the whole.” But the two approaches share something important in common: the ‘taking care of.’ Both approaches “are trying to give you a good reason to care about nonhumans.”<sup>68</sup> When we realize that the parts make the whole and the whole makes the parts, and that “noting what is called *environment* is just lifeforms and their extended genomic expressions [—] think of a spider’s web or a beaver’s dam [—] there’s really no difference between thinking about what is called an ecosystem and what is called a single lifeform.”<sup>69</sup> Similarly, when interpreting a work of art, we don’t separate the whole work from the parts

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<sup>65</sup> Greene, “Literature in Aesthetic Education.”

<sup>66</sup> Ruitenberg, “Art as Alterity in Education,” 247.

<sup>67</sup> Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Morton, *All Art is Ecological*, 48.

<sup>69</sup> Morton, 49.

— the materials used to make it, the context under which it was made, the various interpretations of the work  
 — but we think of all of these parts as one whole experience.

Not only is art a powerful demonstrator of the inseparability of wholes and parts, art also inspires *appreciation*. Morton points to the difference between *tolerating* and *appreciating*; he says that the difference has to do with coexistence:

*Tolerate* means that within my conceptual reference frame, I allow something to exist, even though my frame doesn't really allow it. *Appreciate* means that I just admire it, no matter what my reference frame is. That's why we use the term *appreciate* to talk about art. No one says "I really tolerated that Beethoven string quartet" in a positive way. But you can easily say "I really appreciated that disco tune" and people will know that you mean something positive.<sup>70</sup>

Morton further compares appreciating, or admiring, the ambiguity in a work of art to the ambiguity of ecological thinking: though you might not be able to explain or even understand the processes or elements that make an ecosystem work, you admire and appreciate its intricacy. Claudia Ruitenberg describes experiences of art and art education in a similar manner. In her theory of "art that is other,"<sup>71</sup> Ruitenberg explains that an education for learning to live with art is at the same time an education in learning to live with "the uncertainty and barriers to transparent meaning presented by otherness."<sup>72</sup> We have a responsibility to live with and face otherness, says Ruitenberg, and art education can help with this learning. Although Ruitenberg doesn't address the nonhuman in her theory of art education, the otherness Ruitenberg discusses could well apply to the other-than and more-than human that we often push to the edge of consciousness in our daily practices.

An important aspect of art education is that it asks students to confront something with no clear apparent meaning and find value in spite of the apparent meaninglessness. Ruitenberg notes that when we encounter a work of art that is strange, unsettling, or seemingly meaningless, we're tempted to reject the work as nonsensical or dismiss it as art altogether. But this kind of experience — devoid of utility, association, or

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<sup>70</sup> Morton, 95-96.

<sup>71</sup> Ruitenberg, "Learning to Live with Art," 247.

<sup>72</sup> Ruitenberg, 452.

even meaning — is how Kant describes an experience of beauty. Beauty, for Kant, is disinterested; it has no meaning or purpose but is an enclosed experience in and of itself. Aesthetic experience can be non-cognitive; art, like beauty generally, need not have meaning or use to be valued and appreciated. Applied to an orientation toward the nonhuman, what if we did not look at landscapes, plants, and animals as things that had clear meaning and purpose but instead as something like a work of art that needed only our value and appreciation?

Just as a student may be taught that a perplexing piece of art is all the more interesting and precious *because* of its otherness, might that same student be taught to appreciate the strangeness and unfamiliarity of nonhuman nature and that it is worthy of value and appreciation not only in spite of its otherness but also because of it? I bring Kant's noncognitive conception of aesthetic judgment into conversation with Ruitenberg's notion of "art that is other." Ruitenberg claims that "art-that-is-other" can only be understood in terms of itself, that is, in terms of a framework that is by definition unknown to us.<sup>73</sup> Much of nature's scales, temporality, and processes are frameworks that are misunderstood by or unknown to the human viewer, so perception of nature can often lead to an ontological difficulty. Says Ruitenberg, "I cannot enter the work of art, become part of it, and I cannot make the work of art become part of me. Looking at a work of art means being constantly reminded of its otherness ..."<sup>74</sup> This is true of a difficult, ontologically disruptive piece of art, and it is also true of nonhuman nature. We do not fit neatly into the spaces of the world not made by humans and for humans. Just as nonhumans do not fit neatly into the spaces that we have created for ourselves. Yet we must face one another, confront the otherness, and figure out a way to live side-by-side in a peaceable and mutually beneficial way.

### Overview of Chapters

In chapter two, "The Art of Looking: Aesthetics for Moral Thinking," I outline Kant's aesthetics, address some of the critiques on his thinking, and, finally, explain that, despite some problems, Kant's

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<sup>73</sup> Ruitenberg, 254.

<sup>74</sup> Ruitenberg, 257.

aesthetics is nonetheless helpful toward the cultivation of moral thinking. Kant's aesthetics are helpful for moral thinking in general and moral treatment of the nonhuman in particular because of his notions of *reflective judgement* and *disinterestedness*. This appreciation is morally motivated because it is indicative of an affection for something for its own sake, as opposed to an instrumental desire or a means to an end. On the other hand, I discuss the ways in which beauty is also a concept fraught with problems. Both the perceiver and the perceived are vulnerable to the power of beauty and its pursuit. Looking at others is not a passive act: there are consequences for those at both ends of the visual encounter. Both the human and nonhuman world have been objectified by reifying perception; both have been oppressed by the masculine and imperial gaze. But, at the same time, we cannot avert our eyes from one another or the natural environment around us. I discuss this apparent contradiction in this chapter and think through the ways beauty can be reconceptualized toward environmental consciousness.

On one hand, looking is destructive, but, on the other hand, visibility has been regarded by great thinkers as the first step in meaningful education since the ancient world. I discuss in this chapter what I take to be the primary problem with Kant's aesthetics, which is the bifurcation of the beautiful and the sublime. Many thinkers posit a connection between Kant's conceptual split of these realms of aesthetic experience and his wrongheaded gendered and racial taxonomies,<sup>75</sup> as well his separation of the masculine subject from nature by way of a perceived transcendental freedom.<sup>76</sup> I argue that this split of the human subject from nature by way of the siloed notion of sublimity ultimately led to the othering of nonhuman nature. When beauty is the frame through which we perceive nature, we experience an attentiveness and appreciation that leads to more ethical treatment. Ultimately, I argue that aesthetics is helpful toward a moral relationship to the nonhuman world, and a perception that is sensitive to environment can be cultivated through an aesthetic sensibility, particularly a sensitivity to beauty.

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<sup>75</sup> Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty*; Bonnie Mann, *Women's Liberation and the Sublime: Feminism, Postmodernism, Environment* (Oxford University Press, 2006); Meg Armstrong, "The Effects of Blackness: Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54, no. 3 (1996).

<sup>76</sup> Mann, *Women's Liberation and the Sublime*.

In the third chapter, “Nature in Frames: The Miseducation of the Idle Stare,” I discuss the pervasiveness of nature-based venues —<sup>77</sup> zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens, and safaris — and the implications of positioning nonhuman animals and natural landscapes as objects of contemplation. While the fields of environmental studies and animal ethics have charted the material implications of these venues for the ecosystems and individual beings enclosed in them, I’m interested in how such spaces work as ontological orderings — frames — for the human viewers. I explore the similarities between such venues, like zoos and art exhibits. John Berger, in his book *About Looking*, describes each enclosure in a zoo as a frame around the animal inside it and the visitors moving from one enclosure to another not unlike visitors in an art gallery.<sup>78</sup> “Instagranimal” exists as a term in animal ethics scholarship to describe the incorporation of the nonhuman into human aesthetic curation. I discuss the implications of placing nature in *frames* for the cultivation of an ecoaesthetic sensibility.

I also explore in this chapter the differences if any between nature-related venues and museums. If little difference exists between the two, what does this mean for the ethical standing of nonhuman beings from a human point of view? I discuss the implications of viewing nature as art, taking into consideration the harmful and helpful implications of aesthetic viewing. I’m interested in the ways nonhuman beings and landscapes are situated in our visual perception and the implications for an education for environmental consciousness.

I first look to frames as an object of study. I analyze some of the frames that exist around nonhuman animals, ecosystems, and landscapes from the point of view of institutionalized nature-based education venues: what they mean, what they promote, and what the implications might be for perceiving nature as art. Then, I explore Kant and Dewey’s philosophies of art and what experiences of art mean for the perceivers

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<sup>77</sup> Eric von Essen, Johan Lindsjö, and Charlotte Berg, “Instagranimal: Animal Welfare and Animal Ethics Challenges of Animal-Based Tourism,” *Animals* 10, no. 10 (2020): 1-17; Teresa Lloro-Bidart, “Reassembling the ‘Environment’: Science, Affect, and Multispecies Educative Practice at the Aquarium of the Pacific,” *Environmental Education Research* 21, no. 4 (2015): 650-651; Sarah Louise Spooner, Eric Allen Jensen, Louise Tracey, and Andrew Robert Marshall, “Evaluating the Impacts of Theatre-Based Wildlife and Conservation Education at the Zoo,” *Environmental Education Research* 25, no. 8 (2019): 1231–49.

<sup>78</sup> John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 260.

and perceived. I start from Kant's aesthetics in *Critique of Judgement*; specifically, the relationship Kant posits between contemplation and moral attunement. Kant points to a difference between looking at *art* and looking at *natural* beauty. The former, says Kant, is no guarantee of a compulsion toward morality, but the latter is.<sup>79</sup> I problematize this distinction and think through the implicit differences in something regarded as art and something regarded as Kantian formal beauty. In order to bring Kantian aesthetics into a conversation with aesthetic education, I look to John Dewey's reading of Kant in *Art as Experience*. Dewey troubles Kant's idea of contemplation as devoid of active attention due to its siloing of the visual experience from other sensual experiences and from surrounding material concerns.

On one hand, there seems to be something helpful about art as a frame through which to perceive the nonhuman world because of the appreciation and esteemed regard the attribution "it's a work of art!" begets. On the other hand, I argue that the frame of the zoo and like venues is miseducative because it promotes the kind of one-way gaze, or idle stare, that Dewey critiques of Kant's aesthetics. I argue that a frameless perception, and a locational revision on the part of the human perceiver, promotes a moral orientation toward to the nonhuman world.

In the fourth chapter, "Art Education as Environmental Education," I trouble Kant's idea that an appreciation of art is not an indication of a soul fit for morality. Kant claims that only a taste for beauty in nature is associated with moral goodness. I will argue that there *is* something morally instructive in the act of looking at art and that there is something to be learned through the appreciation of art that will prompt a more moral stance toward the nonhuman world. While some might contend that approximating nature to works of human art diminishes its significance, in my view, there is much to be gained by viewing nature through the framework of our experience of art. An aesthetic appreciation of natural environments and nonhuman others is different than an experience of them mediated through scientific or factual considerations; it is grounded in the immediate perceptual experience of them and has more to do with emotion and imagination than with intellectual aims. But this, I argue, is an important part of developing an

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<sup>79</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 165-166.



appreciation that ultimately leads to respect and ethical treatment. There are many reasons to treat other lifeforms and natural environments well, but *appreciation* is a kind of relationality that doesn't require justifiable explanation: you don't know why you should care, but you do. Although Kant doesn't put it in the same terms, he characterizes the beauty experience in a similar way, as I discuss in chapter two. The kind of appreciation we typically associate with relating to art, might, therefore, be a useful kind of regard for nonhuman others and natural environments because, like Kant's beauty experience, knowledge and reasoning are not required. Art appreciation is what Morton calls *thinkfeel*. Because scientific and factual considerations are not always successful in changing attitudes and feelings, the *thinkfeel* associated with appreciation is a helpful addition.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, "Beauty as Fairness: Aesthetics for Environmental Education," I bring the ideas discussed throughout the dissertation into conversation in an exploration of the educational act of perceiving nature and nonhuman others through the frame of beauty and how this perceptual sensibility might be useful to environmental education. I explore the educational act of not just looking at but being in mindful sensual proximity to nature and nonhuman others. I first outline Scarry's argument for the analogousness of perceiving beauty and extending ethical fairness to others; then, I draw on an encounter with periodical cicadas in an Ohio emergence area in order to illustrate how beauty can bring us into a relation of generosity and reciprocity with the nonhuman world. I look to the cicadas' symmetrical and symbiotic reciprocity with old forest trees and suggest such symmetrical relations as a model of not only beauty but of fair relations with others. Finally, I situate this symmetrical reciprocity within philosophy of education literature toward practical considerations for aesthetics for environmental education.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE ART OF LOOKING: AESTHETICS FOR MORAL THINKING

In their efforts to understand the world around them and their place in it, philosophers have long put the eye and the visual experience at the center of those quests for understanding. The eye has been the referent of metaphors for learning and self-actualization; it has been the site of phenomenological wonderings; and long studied as the means through which aesthetic sensibilities of art and beauty take shape. Plato saw the eye as a metaphor for wisdom, and Aristotle attributed practical reason to an “eye that sees aright.” Later, Alexander Baumgarten theorized a science of visual and sensual experience that he called aesthetics. From this philosophical branch — *aesthetics* — Kant theorized an association between experiences of beauty and moral thinking. In this chapter, I outline Kant’s aesthetics, address some of the critiques on his thinking, and, finally, explain that, despite some problems, Kant’s aesthetics is nonetheless helpful toward the cultivation of moral thinking.

Kant’s aesthetics are helpful for moral thinking in general and moral treatment of the nonhuman in particular because of his notions of *reflective judgement* and *disinterestedness*. When we encounter an entity that we appreciate aesthetically, we are both distanced from the entity and, at the same time, immersed in it. We are at once aware of ourselves and acutely aware of an other. This state of reflective judgment prompts a sensitivity to the existence and characteristics of something other than ourselves. As J. H. Kupfer puts it, “aesthetic experience offers preparation for responding to others in the ongoing business of daily life.”<sup>1</sup> An attention to that which is distinct from ourselves promotes a selflessness which anticipates moral perception. For Kant, aesthetic judgements are concerned with the *beautiful* rather than the useful or even the agreeable. Entities are judged based on an appreciation for their beauty rather than by utility; this judgement is in keeping with

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Kupfer, “Aesthetic Experience as Moral Education,” in *Experience as Art: Aesthetics in Everyday Life* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1983), 75.

Kant's basic moral maxim to treat others always as ends and never as means. Though Kant applied his moral maxims exclusively to humans, ecological and animal ethicists — most notably Tom Regan — have extended Kant's deontology to the nonhuman.<sup>2</sup> When we judge the beauty of an entity, we are not making a judgment based on utility or amenity but a judgement about the form of an entity, and we appreciate it thus. Kant also sees beauty as analogous to morality because the appreciation of beauty does not rely on concepts, and, therefore, does not depend on anything outside of the experience. *Appreciation* is a relation that doesn't require justifiable explanation. In this way, experiences of beauty are *disinterested*. Disinterestedness, in the Kantian sense, is simply a non-utilitarian appreciation for an entity that is the object of aesthetic perception. Kant defines interest as "what we call the liking we connect with the presentation of an object's existence."<sup>3</sup> Interest is concerned with a liking *for the good*, says Kant. If something is *good*, it has some use or is *good for* something. However, "we call something *intrinsically good* if we like it for its own sake," and this kind of intrinsic good is devoid of interest.<sup>4</sup> This appreciation is morally motivated because it is indicative of an affection for something for its own sake, as opposed to an instrumental desire for an entity as a means to an end.

However, beauty is also a concept fraught with problems. Both the human and nonhuman world have been victims of reifying perception; both have been oppressed by the masculine and imperial gaze. In other words, looking at others is not a passive act: there are consequences for those at both ends of the visual encounter. The one perceived is vulnerable to objectification; the one perceiving is also potentially made vulnerable by the impact of perceiving beauty. On one hand, in perceiving a person or thing as beautiful, one runs the risk of objectifying said person or thing. At the same time, we cannot avert our eyes from one another or the natural environment around us. Moreover, visibility has been regarded by great thinkers as the first step in meaningful education since the ancient world. In this chapter, I address this tension and think through the relationship of beauty and morality.

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<sup>2</sup> Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 45.

<sup>4</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*. 48.

Kant's aesthetics explicated the connection between aesthetic judgments and morality. One problem with Kant's aesthetics, though, is the bifurcation of the beautiful and the sublime. He made the two distinct in his treatise on aesthetics *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*. He discusses feelings of both the beautiful and sublime to describe "moral qualities."<sup>5</sup> Being moved by either of the two "finer feelings" is morally impactful, says Kant, but in different ways. The sublime is like

the sight of a mountain whose snow-covered peaks arise above the clouds, the description of a raging storm, or the depiction of the kingdom of hell by Milton ... [It] arouses satisfaction, but with dread; by contrast, the prospect of meadows strewn with flowers, of valleys with winding brooks, covered with grazing herds ... also occasion an agreeable sentiment, but one that is joyful and smiling. For the former to make its impression on us in its proper strength, we must have a feeling of the sublime, and in order properly to enjoy the latter we must have a feeling for the beautiful. Lofty oaks and lonely shadows in sacred groves are sublime, flowerbeds, low hedges, and trees trimmed into figures are beautiful. The night is sublime, the day is beautiful.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, feelings of the sublime are powerful and disruptive, sometimes to the point of dread, whereas feelings of the beautiful are delightful and make us smile. However, Patrick Frierson points out in his introduction to the Cambridge edition of *Observations* that, unlike the later *Critique of Judgement*, *Observations* is more an anthropological project than a philosophical one. As a result, in this treatise on aesthetics, Kant describes the beautiful and sublime not only as moral feelings one might have about experiences but also qualities of human people. People themselves are not only described as beautiful or sublime but also their "character of mind" or point of view:<sup>7</sup>

Casts of mind that possess a feeling for the sublime are gradually drawn into lofty sentiments, of friendship, of contempt for the world, of eternity, by the quiet calm of a summer evening, when the flickering light of the stars breaks through the umber shadows of the night and the lonely moon rises into view. The brilliant day inspires busy fervor and a feeling of gaiety. The sublime touches, the beautiful charms. The mien of the human being who finds himself in the full feeling of the sublime is serious, sometimes even rigid and astonished. By contrast, the lively sentiment of the beautiful announces itself through shining cheerfulness in the eyes, through traces of a smile, and often through audible mirth. The sublime is in turn of different sorts. The feeling of it is sometimes accompanied with some dread or even melancholy, in some cases merely with quiet admiration and in yet others with a beauty spread over a sublime prospect ... Deep solitude is sublime, but in a terrifying way.

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<sup>5</sup> Patrick Frierson, Introduction to *Observations*, xvii.

<sup>6</sup> Kant, *Observations*, 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Frierson, Introduction to *Observations*, xxviii.

A person with a beautiful character of mind is warm and cheerful, whereas one with a sublime character of mind is serious, rigid, melancholy, even dreadful. These different “characters of mind” were the starting point for the gendered and racial orderings Kant makes in *Observations* that are the source of much criticism of Kant’s aesthetics. Many thinkers posit a connection between Kant’s conceptual split of these realms of aesthetic experience and his wrongheaded gendered and racial taxonomies,<sup>8</sup> as well his separation of the masculine subject from nature by way of a perceived transcendental freedom.<sup>9</sup> The split of the human subject from nature ultimately led to the othering of nonhuman nature.

Kant used these distinctions to offer up observations on the human relationship to nature generally and also the tension between human dependency on nature and freedom.<sup>10</sup> If humans are natural creatures, how can they also be free from material dependencies? Kant’s answer to this problem is to approximate groups of people as either closer to nature or further from it (transcended to freedom, not impeded by material dependencies). He begins by using natural metaphors: the “lofty oaks and lonely shadows in sacred groves,” are the more ‘natural’ or untamed and therefore sublime, whereas “flowerbeds, low hedges, and trees trimmed into figures” are the more tamed or ‘civilized,’ and therefore beautiful. He then extends these categories to human people: racialized and exoticized others are sublime because of their proximity to untamed nature. Women occupy a middle ground: they’re tamed enough for the civilized marker of beauty but not far enough from nature to qualify for transcendent freedom. Indeed, Bonnie Mann notes that in Kant’s early work on beauty “women become most radically interchangeable with English gardens and landscape paintings.”<sup>11</sup> I discuss these ideas and the criticisms of them in the third section on this chapter.

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<sup>8</sup> Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ & Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 1999); Bonnie Mann, *Women’s Liberation and the Sublime: Feminism, Postmodernism, Environment* (Oxford University Press, 2006); Meg Armstrong, “‘The Effects of Blackness’: Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54, no. 3 (1996).

<sup>9</sup> Mann, *Women’s Liberation and the Sublime*.

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, intr. Patrick Frierson, eds. Patrick Frierson & Paul Guyer (Cambridge University Press, 2011), xxii.

<sup>11</sup> Mann, *Women’s Liberation and the Sublime*, 26.

However, Kant does not carry these anthropological musings into his aesthetics in the *Critique of Judgement*. Kant's later writings characterize beauty and sublimity as *experiences* rather than ways of classifying various peoples. Scarry notes in *On Beauty* that *Observations* “does not convey the many complications of Kant's own later writing on the subject [of the sublime and beautiful], nor of the important writings following it.”<sup>12</sup> I take a cue from Scarry and argue that if the two realms of aesthetics are rejoined, Kant's beauty experience — especially as laid out in *Critique of Judgement* — is helpful for moral thinking. When the two realms of aesthetic experience are brought back together under the umbrella of the beauty experience, as Scarry suggests in *On Beauty*, we experience an attentiveness and appreciation that leads to more ethical treatment: an experience of beauty can be both shocking and mysterious, as well as delightful and charming; it can be both violent to our imagination and in harmony with our understanding. I discuss these ideas in the final section of this chapter. Ultimately, I argue that aesthetics is helpful toward a moral relationship to the nonhuman world, and a perception that is sensitive to environment can be cultivated through an aesthetic sensibility, particularly a sensitivity to beauty. However, before going forward, I will outline a brief history of philosophies of perception and beauty. Kant was not the first to associate looking for beauty with moral thinking.

### **Looking and Seeing: Philosophical Roots**

Perception and experiences of beauty have been central to western philosophy since the ancients. Plato set the terms for the philosophical conversations about beauty that followed in both the *Republic* and *Symposium*. Plato, theorizing an order of forms underlying all experience, questions the difference between the physiological act of looking and the philosophical act of seeing *absolute beauty*. To what extent is seeing as a physiological process different from seeing with the “perfect vision” of the world of forms, wonders Plato in the *Republic*.<sup>13</sup> In Book VI, Socrates questions Glaucon about the qualities a guardian of the city ought to possess. After establishing that good guardians ought to have eyes, Socrates asks Glaucon whether ordinary

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<sup>12</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 83.

<sup>13</sup> Plato, Book VI, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2000), 149; Book VII; Book VI 149.

eyes are sufficient or whether eyes which can see with the “perfect vision of the other world to order the laws about beauty, goodness, justice in this” are preferable.<sup>14</sup> In this instance, we learn that Plato views the eyes as not only mechanisms through which we experience the world empirically, but also as metaphor for the process of understanding the world of forms in which there are absolute truths about things like beauty, goodness, and justice. For Plato, there are worldly iterations of beauty that serve pleasure and vice (“The ordinary goods of life” — beauty included — “have a corrupting and distracting effect”),<sup>15</sup> but there is also a form of beauty which is associated with moral goodness. Socrates to Glaucon again:

Then let me ask you to consider further whether the world will ever be induced to believe in the existence of absolute beauty rather than the many of the beautiful, or of the absolute in each kind rather than of the many in kind?<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, in *Symposium*, Plato correlates beauty and goodness in The Speech of Diotima. Diotima asks Socrates, “what is the point of loving beautiful things?” His response: so “that they become [one’s] own.” In order to figure out “what [one] will have when the beautiful things he wants have become his own,” Diotima asks Socrates to perform a thought experiment by replacing the word beauty with the word “good,” so the question becomes “what is the point of loving good things.”

“Now, then,” she said. “Can we simply say that people love the good?”

“Yes,” I said.

“But shouldn’t we add that, in loving it, they want the good to be theirs?”

“We should.”

“And not only that,” she said. “They want the good to be theirs forever, don’t they?”

“We should add that too.”

“In a word, then, love is wanting to possess the good forever.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Plato, Book VI, *The Republic*, 156.

<sup>15</sup> Plato, 156.

<sup>16</sup> Plato, 158.

<sup>17</sup> Plato, “Speech of Diotima,” *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1989), 52.

Socrates agrees, but eventually the two conclude that what starts as feelings of possessiveness, becomes an understanding of the form of goodness, which cannot be possessed. The two eventually restore beauty to the subject of the question: what might start as desire to possess beautiful things becomes an understanding of the form of beauty and thereby goodness:

...one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very [form of] Beauty ...<sup>18</sup>

Diotima tells Socrates here that what might begin as desire and possessiveness, even lustful desire for a human body, transcends to an appreciation of the form of beauty, which is divine. At that point, one wishes only to be in the presence of and behold true beauty, which Plato equates to virtue and goodness because “Beauty, is in harmony with the divine.”<sup>19</sup>

Aristotle, too, associated beauty with rightness and virtue. In *Politics*, for example, Aristotle proclaims that “the state which combines magnitude with good order must necessarily be the most beautiful.”<sup>20</sup> Further, in discussing the proper education of children, he states that students should be instructed in reading, writing, and drawing, not only for their usefulness but also “because it makes them judges of the beauty of ... form.”<sup>21</sup> More generally, Aristotle understood the visual arts to be important to human development. He considered proper emotional development and that of practical wisdom as one in the same and therefore regarded at least some arts as helpful to this kind of growth.<sup>22</sup> Art can help us understand the world, ourselves, and our relations, thinks Aristotle. Additionally, art may contribute to the development of moral virtue. To be sure, Aristotle agrees with Plato about the problematic effects of some art in civic formation.<sup>23</sup> In *The Republic*,

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<sup>18</sup> Plato, “Speech of Diotima,” 59.

<sup>19</sup> Plato, 53.

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, Book VII, trans. Benjamin Jowett, retrieved from <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, Book VIII.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, Book VIII.

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, Book VIII.



Plato explains that the ideal city would contain no creative arts at all as these are a corrupting limitation and distraction from the order of forms.<sup>24</sup> Aristotle saw some value in art, but, if not created by the hands of ethical artists, or not consumed in moderation, it might have “evil effects.”<sup>25</sup> *Nevertheless*, both Plato and Aristotle regarded the arts, beauty, and the visual experience broadly to be — for better or worse — significant to human moral development.

The association of beauty and morality shows up later in eighteenth-century philosophy, when Alexander Baumgarten adapted the term “aesthetic” from the Greek *aestheta*, or things perceived, to refer to a science of sense perception.<sup>26</sup> Baumgarten brought the physiological experience of visual perception and the cognitive experience of judgement together. While Baumgarten treated aesthetics like a science, David Hume treated aesthetics more like a sensibility. Central in his thinking was the idea of *taste*: a sensitivity to finery or an ability to discern beauty. Hume, like the ancients, tied sensitivity to beauty to moral development. Along the same line, Voltaire thought aesthetic taste was something that could be developed via an education. He compared an aesthetic taste to the very sense the word is used as a metaphor for:

...a quick discernment like that of the tongue and the palate, and which, like them, anticipates reflection; like the palate, it voluptuously relishes what is good; and it rejects the bad with loathing; it is also, like the palate, often uncertain and doubtful ... and sometimes requires habit to help it form.<sup>27</sup>

Through these understanding of taste and sensibility, an approach to the pleasurable experiences of beauty and art emerged. Aesthetics became not only a set of theories to describe a sensual phenomenon but also a particular kind of sensibility that could be cultivated via an education. In other words, like a moral sensibility, aesthetics became a teachable area.

Kant’s formalist aesthetics marks a major modern turn in thought about the visual experience and its connection to moral judgement. Like Plato, Kant draws a distinction between sensual charms and a direct

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<sup>24</sup> Plato, Book III, *The Republic*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, Book VIII.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B Holther (1735; reprint: Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1954), 78.

<sup>27</sup> Voltaire, entries s.v. “Gout” in Diderot and D’Alembert, *Encyclopedie*.

interest in the form of beauty. For Kant, aesthetic judgements aspire to a subjective universality; if someone judges something to be beautiful, they expect the same liking from others. Therefore, beauty transcends subjective particularity by purporting subjective universality, not unlike a sense of morality. Kant calls this kind of judgement *reflective* judgement. Contrary to determining judgement, which has a primary partner in understanding, the purpose of reflective judgement “is not posited in the object [being perceived] at all, but posited solely in the subject: in the subject’s mere power to reflect.”<sup>28</sup> Reflective judgements are for Kant the kinds of judgements concerned with aesthetics.

Though aesthetic judgements are subjective because of their involvement with pleasure, Kant draws a distinction between pleasure derived from sensual gratification (the agreeable) and that derived from reflective judgement. Therefore, the type of pleasure derived from reflective (aesthetic) judgements is not the result of satisfaction of a desire but is rather a pleasure that is free from both sensuous and intellectual gratification. This pleasure is that which is usually had in the midst of beauty (especially in nature), or, in the case of the sublime, in the presence of something awe-inspiring. For Kant, nature has a special position in reflective judgement: it has an apparent subjective “purposiveness” in that it appears to us to have a teleological order, which resembles moral lawfulness. Arnold Berleant calls Kant’s purposiveness a “synthetic a priori,” which helps in the human perceiver’s recognition “that connections exist in the very nature of things, before all experience and thought.”<sup>29</sup> In addition to nature’s purposiveness, judgements about nature are pleasure-bearing for the perceiver due to the harmony of imagination and understanding which takes place during experiences of beauty.

Kant’s idea of disinterestedness, rather than abstracting the subject from the situation and context of the object of contemplation, only requires the absence of purpose (satisfaction of a desire or utility). Emily Brady points to “mistaken associations ... of the terms ‘disinterestedness,’ ‘distancing’ and ‘detachment.’”

Disinterestedness is too often taken to mean indifference rather than interest or attention to aesthetic qualities alone. ‘Distancing’ is mistakenly coupled with the idea of creating distance (physical or otherwise) between subject and object rather than distancing oneself from

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<sup>28</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 404.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 6.

desires and needs which might get in the way of appreciating the object itself. This mistake is not surprising given the conventions that hold in viewing artworks, and the physical barriers that we sometimes put between ourselves and the natural environment. ‘Detachment’ is understood not as setting aside utilitarian interests in relation to an object, but rather, mistakenly, as cutting oneself off from one’s own experience.<sup>30</sup>

Kant’s characterization of aesthetic judgement as reflective and disinterested is often misinterpreted as passive and removed, or, worse, as a reifying gaze. However, as Elaine Scarry points out, an experience of beauty is not unidirectional: the beholder is just as vulnerable as the beheld. The perceiver is changed in some way by the experience of beauty provoked by the qualities of the perceived at the other end of the gaze.<sup>31</sup>

Another pervasive critique of Kant’s aesthetics is his claim that judgements of beauty, though subjective, purport a universality. For Kant, like Plato, there is a form of beauty that is only found in nature. Formalism, especially the idea of formal beauty, is a tricky idea to square with justice-oriented education. Historically, beauty has been used as a means of discrimination, subordination, and oppression. Perhaps this explains Scarry’s starting point in *On Beauty and Being Just*: the apparent divergence between beauty and morality in humanities education. One can understand the impulse among humanists to distance themselves from beauty given the harm done in its name, which I outline in the sections that follow. For these reasons, Kant is given only a cursory consideration in most works of philosophy of education concerning aesthetics,<sup>32</sup> and little to no attention in work bringing together aesthetics and environmental education.<sup>33</sup> David Carr

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<sup>30</sup> Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 134.

<sup>31</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 75-76.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Brodén, “Acknowledging Ambivalence in Teaching About Art and Aesthetics,” *Educational Theory* 70, no. 1 (2020): 31-42; Guillermo Marini, “An Introduction to Everyday Aesthetics in Education,” *Studies in Philosophy & Education* 40, no. 1 (2021): 39-50; Barbara Weber, “Childhood, Philosophy and Play: Friedrich Schiller and the Interface between Reason, Passion and Sensation,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 45, no. 2 (2011): 235-250; Guoping Zhao, “Art as Alterity in Education,” *Educational Theory* 64, no. 3 (2014): 245-259.

<sup>33</sup> Robert L. Chapman, “How to Think about Environmental Studies,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 41, no. 1 (2007): 59-74; Sevet Oral, “Weird Reality, Aesthetics, and Vitality in Education,” *Studies in Philosophy & Education* 34, no. 5 (2015): 459-74; Yuriko Saito, “Is There a Correct Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature?” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 18, no. 4 (1984): 35-46; Adrian Skilbeck and Jeff Stickney, “Section 6 Aesthetic Reflections on Environmental Devastation: Seeing Things Clearly During the Climate Crisis,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54, no. 4 (2020): 1097; Jeff Stickney and Michael Bonnett, “‘Emplaced Transcendence’ as Ecologising Education in Michael Bonnett’s Environmental Philosophy,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54, no. 4 (2020): 1087-96; Sharon Todd, “Creating Aesthetic Encounters of the World, or Teaching in the Presence of Climate Sorrow,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54, no. 4 (2020): 1110-25. David Carr and Pradeep Dhillon are notable exceptions: David Carr, “Moral Values and the Arts in Environmental Education: Towards an Ethics of Aesthetic Appreciation,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 38, no. 2 (2004): 221-39; Pradeep Dhillon, “Naturalizing Aesthetics: Moderate Formalism and Global Education” in *Neuroscience and Education: A Philosophical Appraisal* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 128-143; Pradeep Dhillon, “A Kantian Approach to Global Art History: The Case from Indian Modern Art,” in *The Many Faces of Beauty* (Durham, NC: University of Notre Dame Press), 302-326.

questions the value of form in art education. He suggests an account of art that privileges pluralism, representation, and expression rather than formalism.<sup>34</sup> In their article describing an art teacher preparation course, Barchana-Lorand and Galnoor couch Kant as a mere introduction to Schiller's theory of aesthetic education, and they do not make him a substantive part of the syllabus.<sup>35</sup> However, as Brady points out, Kant's formalism and notion of disinterestedness "has an important history in moral philosophy, and it defines another key feature of the traditional view of aesthetic experience."

### **Kant and Problems with Beauty**

Kant's characterization of the beauty experience, while the impetus of conversations in western philosophy about aesthetics, is not without problems. In this section, I outline some of Kant's claims about visuality and beauty, as well as critiques of Kant made by critical feminists, critical scholars of race, and post-colonial readers. Most of these critiques are of Kant's anthropological categories laid out in *Observations*.

Looking, or the *gaze*, has a bad reputation among scholars of identity. Critical feminists, scholars of race, and post-colonial thinkers have illuminated the harms done by the male gaze upon women and the imperialist's gaze upon exoticized others. Experiences of gender, race, and place of origin are, not exclusively, but often, aesthetic experiences. Kant takes true aesthetic experiences to be formal and therefore essential. For this reason, Kantian aesthetic judgement poses a problem for identity and justice. However, though some interpretations of Kantian aesthetics have been problematic, and even some of Kant's writing itself betrays some outmoded ideas about human and nonhuman capacities, nevertheless, he has much to offer an aesthetics of environment.

#### *Gendered Aesthetics*

The philosophical tradition of aesthetics is wrought with problematic gendered commitments. As Bonnie Mann points out, it has been used as the site at which the Euro-masculine subject has been

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<sup>34</sup> David Carr, "Dangerous Knowledge: On the Epistemic and Moral Significance of Arts in Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 3 (2010): 4.

<sup>35</sup> Dorit Barchana-Lorand and Efrat Galnoor, "Philosophy of Art Education in the Visual Culture: Aesthetics for Art Teachers," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. 1 (2009): 133-148.

constructed and the feminine subject has been subordinated. Feminist criticisms of aesthetics include Kant's notion of a disinterested judgment or a judgement devoid of concepts of use or necessity. According to Carolyn Korsmeyer: "art and aesthetic taste are powerful framers of self-image, social identity, and public values."<sup>36</sup> The implication being that aesthetic pleasure cannot be universal because every person is situated at different social and economic locations which impact their perception of beauty and art. In other words, aesthetic viewing can never be devoid of interest because of its role in social and cultural formation.<sup>37</sup> According to Bonnie Mann, Kant's characterization of aesthetic experiences of the beautiful are relational as "women, nature, and art all occasion the experience for men."<sup>38</sup> In Kant's early account of aesthetics the notion of disinterestedness is masculinized because of its relationship to contemplation: a distanced and removed visual experience of an object or entity, and only men are capable of such deep thought.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, in aesthetic philosophy, "disinterestedness has been viewed as a problematic and somewhat outdated concept."<sup>40</sup> However, Brady argues for an interpretation of Kantian disinterestedness which leaves behind the gendered aspects and asks us to focus on the term's association with morality. She situates the original meaning of disinterestedness in eighteenth-century moral philosophy, where philosophers associated the disinterested standpoint with morality: "Moral action is motivated by affection for something for its own sake, and it is therefore contrasted with desiring an object as a means to an end, for one's own pleasure or for any other use ..." Moreover, to be disinterested "does not entail the ... abstraction ....assumed by its critics ... Aesthetic appreciation does not require that we set aside who we are, it requires only that we set aside *what*

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<sup>36</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction* (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), 51.

<sup>37</sup> However, it bears noting that Kant takes art to be imitative of true beauty rather than exemplary of the form of beauty. A successful work of art might resemble the form of beauty only found in nature, but Kant does not associate appreciation of art with moral judgement, though he does associate appreciation of the beautiful in nature with moral judgement. Nevertheless, Mann's argument that aesthetics and especially beauty are "attached to and expressive of deeply gendered interests" holds (Mann, 24). I return to a discussion of gendered depictions in visual art specifically in the next chapter.

<sup>38</sup> Mann, *Women's Liberation and the Sublime*, 26.

<sup>39</sup> Mann, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 10.

*we want.*"<sup>41</sup> In this interpretation, disinterested aesthetic appreciation is not detached from the self as scholars of identity claim.

However, an issue not as easily reconciled is the way in which aesthetic experiences have been gendered through the visual experience broadly, which Carolyn Korsmeyer traces to Aristotle. According to Korsmeyer, "Aristotle defines the sexes in opposition to each other" in all metaphysical categories, including how pleasures are managed.<sup>42</sup> On Korsmeyer's read of Aristotle, "women are by nature less competent than men because their relational faculties are less able to govern their appetites and emotions."<sup>43</sup> Kant kept up this tradition of ordering the senses but also extends this hierarchy to aesthetic judgments by way of the dichotomization of experiences of the beautiful and the sublime.<sup>44</sup> For Kant, the main way the beautiful and the sublime differ is that beauty is "the exhibition of an indeterminate concept of *understanding*" and the sublime is "the exhibition of an indeterminate concept of *reason*."<sup>45</sup> When experiencing beauty, the imagination is at play and harmonized with understanding; on the other hand, when experiencing the sublime, the activity of the imagination is not play but seriousness and concerned with reason, says Kant. Where "beauty carries with it a purposiveness in its form," "the sublime in its form is contrapurposeful for our power of judgement ... and as it were violent to our imagination."<sup>46</sup> Simply put, beauty is unity and the sublime is chaos; "the sublime moves, the beautiful charms."<sup>47</sup> Mann and Scarry are both critical of the dichotomization of the beautiful and the sublime for its gendered implications. Scarry claims that the result of the juxtaposition of the beautiful with the sublime, made at the end of the eighteenth-century first by Edmund Burke then Kant, was the demotion of beauty. "In the newly subdivided aesthetic realm," says Scarry, "the

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<sup>41</sup> Brady, 132.

<sup>42</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 32.

<sup>43</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 32.

<sup>44</sup> By modern I mean Kant and onward.

<sup>45</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 98.

<sup>46</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 98-99.

<sup>47</sup> Kant, *Observations*, 47.

sublime is male and the beautiful is female ... the sublime is principled, noble, righteous; the beautiful is compassionate and good-hearted.”<sup>48</sup>

While beauty is merely sensually charming, the sublime is awesome and inspiring. Beauty involves appetite and the senses, while the sublime involves reason and intellect. Both Aristotle and Kant attribute reason to the masculine and emotion and appetite to the feminine. Aristotle also thought “that the minds of women are less inclined to apprehend knowledge in an abstract, universal form, more inclined to particular judgements of sense.”<sup>49</sup> This might be because, thinks Aristotle, women have an unreliable sense of sight due to menstruation clouding the eyes.<sup>50</sup> This is a problem for the apprehension of abstract knowledge because “vision feeds the intellect.”<sup>51</sup> Plato’s notion of the eye as the portal through which truth flowed to the soul echoes here. Perhaps this is why Kant considered the “distance sense” of vision to be the only means through which one can have a truly aesthetic experience. He expelled gustatory taste completely from his thinking on aesthetics and does not treat auditory or tactile experiences as aesthetic either. Vision rules from the ancients to Kant when it comes to experiences of aesthetic beauty and sublimity, and vision as a portal to meaning making has been systematically masculinized.

Because beauty was the diminutive member of the dichotomous pairing, it was also the dismissible member. On Mann’s reading, Kant found grounds for experiences of wonder and awe in relation to nature in man himself: “the sublime will be one key site of Kant’s insistence that a misplaced reverence for the natural world be replaced by an appropriate reverence for human reason.”<sup>52</sup> Kant wondered how human freedom could be reconciled with nature: “how can a creature of nature not be a creature of nature at all?”<sup>53</sup> Because “there is a closely lived conflict between bodily needs and freedom ... at the root of Kant’s dilemma,”

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<sup>48</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 83-84.

<sup>49</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 32.

<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, *On Dreams*, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/dreams.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 32.

<sup>52</sup> Mann, *Women’s Liberation and the Sublime*, 34.

<sup>53</sup> Mann, 37.

women are less free and less able to transcend because of their ties to nature: menstruation, birth, and breastfeeding. In fact, as Mann notes, “Kant’s first treatise on the subject of women’s proper place and education is also his first treatise on aesthetics.”<sup>54</sup> The internal violence of the experience of the sublime “establishes the dominance of the masculine over the feminine at the same time that it catapults the subject out of his dependence on nature and into a fantasy of his own freedom.”<sup>55</sup> This euro-masculine fantasy of freedom bestowed on women a weaker subjectivity as mere perceivers of the beautiful, and, eventually, “this subjectivity [gave] way to their much more primary role as beautiful objects of masculine contemplation.”<sup>56</sup> Women share this role in the Euro-masculine tradition with nonhuman animals and racialized, othered humans perceived as closer to untamed nature and juxtaposed to civilization and therefore transcendent freedom.

However, Mann argues that Kantian aesthetics, if decoupled from a masculine transcendent subject, actually provides a mode of perception conducive to environmental thinking. Kant focused in *Observation* on women’s closeness to nature because of their material dependencies. However, we are *all* dependent on nature. According to Mann, overcoming a dependence on nature and environment has been a masculinist project, has defined human freedom, and has ultimately led to the current human alienation from environment and place. Mann also points out Hannah Arendt’s argument “that from the Greeks to the present, material necessity and freedom have been seen as contradictory, and freedom from the realm of necessity has always been seen as good.”<sup>57</sup> Though postmodern life has “made a profound disorientation in our relations to others and the natural world,” aesthetic experiences of nature might have a place in the cultivation of more just human-nonhuman relations. A discussion of dependency on nature ought to be connected to a discussion of environmental issues. Because human beings are dependent on the environment,

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<sup>54</sup> Mann, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Mann, 38.

<sup>56</sup> Mann, 38.

<sup>57</sup> Mann on Arendt, 20.



there is a way to “tie the [gender and aesthetics] debate back into a concern with the places we inhabit.”<sup>58</sup>

These ideas offer a starting point for an explanation of the gendered problems with a Kantian aesthetics and a potential link between the implications of looking at gendered others and looking at nature.

### *Racialized Aesthetics*

Kant, following from Edmund Burke, perceived aesthetic dichotomies not only regarding gender, but with regard to racial and ethnic demarcations as well. Both Burke and Kant, in their respective treatises on aesthetics,<sup>59</sup> describe the sublime through analogies not only to sexual and gendered differences but also as an aesthetic disposition inherent in race and nationality.<sup>60</sup> In Burkian and Kantian aesthetics, beauty is associated with women and people of European decent, where the racially or exoticized other is associated with the sublime: the dark side of perception, the psychological break with unity, the unknown, the other. The experience of the sublime is violent upon the mind, says Kant—it breaks with reason and understanding. This is in keeping with the perception of racial and exoticized others from the European perspective as closer to nature and further from human civilization. Just as Kant associates the experience of the sublime with the wonder and awe of nature, he describes certain peoples as possessing the same exotic, disunified, and mysterious qualities.<sup>61</sup> For example, peoples from faraway places whose customs, dress, and acts of worship were unfamiliar to Kant, he designated sublime like nonhuman nature.

Likely due to Kant’s leaving these ideas behind in the *Third Critique*, published more than 15 years after *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, his classifications of people as either beautiful or sublime has received little attention. Kant’s later writings characterize beauty and sublimity as *experiences* rather than ways of classifying various peoples. Scarry notes in *On Beauty* that *Observations* “does not convey the many complications of Kant’s own later writing on the subject [of the sublime and beautiful], nor of the

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<sup>58</sup> Mann, *Women’s Liberation and the Sublime*, 19.

<sup>59</sup> Kant, *Observations*; Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), retrieved from [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15043/15043-h/15043-h.htm#A\\_PHILOSOPHICAL\\_INQUIRY](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15043/15043-h/15043-h.htm#A_PHILOSOPHICAL_INQUIRY).

<sup>60</sup> Meg Armstrong, “‘The Effects of Blackness’: Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burker and Kant,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54, no. 3 (1996): 213.

<sup>61</sup> Kant, *Observations*, 50-62.

important writings following it.”<sup>62</sup> For example, Meg Armstrong points to a notable silence in the literature on aesthetics on the relationship between the sublime and the exoticized other outlined in *Observations*. Further, Armstrong notes a neglect “to mention the prevalent association between the sublime and various, embodied forms of difference.”<sup>63</sup> Armstrong points to a connection between “sublime objects or phenomena which are suggestive of things not readily encompassed, conceptualized, or represented” and “‘culturally unintelligible’ bodies and others.” During the Enlightenment period, in which trade and imperialist conquest brought the Euro/Western gaze face-to-face with unknown and unfamiliar ‘others,’ thinkers like Burke and Kant attempted to make sense of different ways of being and seeing by taxonomizing both aesthetic presentation and sensibility. The bodies

imported from foreign domains, [were positioned as]“other” by virtue of racial or cultural differences, often from regions important to imperialistic designs, of European empires. Yet, even if such bodies are initially “abject”—neither subject nor object—they quickly become *subjected to* an aesthetic discourse. By positioning the subject within a constellation of images of foreign bodies which compel sublime vision, the aesthetic uses these “abject” or “black bodies” to organize desires for difference.<sup>64</sup>

In the chapter of *Observations* in which Kant racializes the sublime experience, in addition to the confusing and seemingly arbitrary ways in which he assigns the effeminate sensibility of beauty to the French and Spanish and the masculine sublime sensibility to the German and English, he also comments on certain groups’ ability to perceive in a particular way, and, in so doing, seems to have played a role in shaping how these groups have been *seen* historically by the Eurowestern gaze. For example, Kant says of “the Arab,” whom he incidentally names “the noblest human being in the Orient,” he has an “inflamed power of imagination [that] presents things to him in unnatural and distorted images.”<sup>65</sup> Additionally, he says of “the Indians,” “Their religion consists of grotesqueries. Images of idols of enormous shape, the priceless tooth of the mighty ape Hanuman, the unnatural atonements of the Fakirs (heathen mendicant monks), etc., are in this taste.”

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<sup>62</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 83.

<sup>63</sup> Armstrong, “The Effects of Blackness,” 213.

<sup>64</sup> Armstrong, 214.

<sup>65</sup> Kant, *Observations*, 58.

Although these are comments on the ways in which these peoples see, they might also be read as descriptive of the ways in which Kant *sees* these peoples. These perceptions did not stop at Kant's *Observations* and have shaped the way the Euro/Western gaze sees others. For example, the perception of Arabic people as having a distorted view of freedom was the public rhetoric of the 9/11/Bush administration period in the United States. The perception of Indians as abiding to a grotesque religion which deifies idols is yet another example.

Perhaps the most egregious indictment is Kant's on peoples of African descent. Kant writes

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous ... among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who have been transported elsewhere from their countries, although very many of them have been set free, nevertheless not a single one has ever been found who has accomplished something great in art or science or shown any other praiseworthy quality, while among the whites there are always those who rise up from the lowest rabble and through extraordinary gifts earn respect in the world. So essential is the difference between these two human kinds, and it seems to be just as great with regard to the capacities of mind as it is with respect to color ...<sup>66</sup>

Not only is this an indictment on intellectual and industrial capacity, but it is also a critique of a particular kind of ontology. Kant ultimately does not think the way black Africans *see* the world holds any merit. In denying black people an aesthetic sensibility, Kant also denies them a moral one, as he takes the two kinds of judgement to be related. Moreover, Kant's claim that black Africans lack any finer feeling and that they thus occupy the lowest spot in this hierarchy of racially or nationally based ways of seeing the world "is often repeated in later aesthetic comments comparing various nations, for instance at European and American fairs and exposition in the nineteenth century."<sup>67</sup> I discuss these human aesthetic classifications, and the shared oppression of exoticized others and the nonhuman, in the following section.

### *Coloniality and the Gaze*

The exoticized human subject and the nonhuman share a provocation of the sublime in the imperialist gaze. Circuses and zoos have historically exploited nonhumans and humans alike for the stultifying gaze of the voyeur.<sup>68</sup> In his book *About Looking*, John Berger compares the one-way gaze of the

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<sup>66</sup> Kant, 58-59.

<sup>67</sup> Armstrong, "The Effects of Blackness," 224.

<sup>68</sup> Lenore Manderson, "Humans on Show: Performance, Race and Representation." *Critical African Studies* 10, no. 3 (October 2018): 257—71; Patricia Purtschert, "The Return of the Native: Racialised Space, Colonial Debris and the Human Zoo," *Identities* 22, no. 4 (2015): 508—23; Carol Adams & Josephine Donovan, eds. *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (Durham, NC: Duke

zoogoer to both the male gaze upon the female and the imperialist's gaze upon the exoticized other.<sup>69</sup> In her examination of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and London's Great Exhibition in 1851, Armstrong discusses the exoticizing process of nineteenth-century American and European aesthetic ideologies and suggests that these ideologies "helped to form exotically sublime and stereotypical others," as well as went on to inform the modern cosmopolitan sensibility.<sup>70</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, fairs and exhibitions—along with commercializing and commodifying the artifacts, fashion, and decorative schemes of exoticized others—were a part of a process that Armstrong calls "subliming the exotic."<sup>71</sup> The purpose of such fairs and expositions was ultimately to, as Armstrong writes, "promote the hegemony of European or American 'civilization' in all things."<sup>72</sup> In other words, these large-scale, 'cultural' events were meant to display people and artifacts in such a way that ordered and taxonomized them into 'types,' clearly demarcating them from the white, male, unified way of being. Armstrong describes the midway of the Columbian Exposition in Chicago as a site at which two competing aesthetic ideologies are at work. One is the exotic: chaotic, grotesque, "a bawdy array of colors, sights, scents, and sounds."<sup>73</sup> The other is European cosmopolitanism: "steady and orderly progress ... toward the pinnacle of technological achievement."<sup>74</sup> One is chaotic and assaulting to the imagination; one is harmonious and reinforcing of imaginaries. One is the sublime and the other beauty, in the Kantian sense of these terms.

These exhibitions, along with zoos and circuses in general, reflect some of the problems with the Burkeian and Kantian lineage of aesthetics in Western philosophy: the act of "subliming the exotic," as Armstrong puts it, and feminizing beauty. By separating the harmonizing experience of beauty from the

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University Press, 1998); Maneesha Deckha, "Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist, Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Nonhuman Animals," *Hypatia*, 27 (2015): 527-545. Recent documentaries bear this out: *Tiger King* and *Blackfish* expose the intersecting oppression of humans and nonhuman others in the edutainment industry.

<sup>69</sup> John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 260.

<sup>70</sup> Meg Armstrong, "'A Jumble of Foreignness': The Sublime Musayums of Nineteenth-Century Fairs and Expositions," *Cultural Critique* no. 23 (winter 1992-1993): 201.

<sup>71</sup> Armstrong, "Jumble of Foreignness," 200.

<sup>72</sup> Armstrong, 200.

<sup>73</sup> Armstrong, 200.

<sup>74</sup> Armstrong, 201.

disruptive experience of the sublime, Burke and Kant charted a course for the harmful categorizing of non-European, nonmale, and nonhuman others. Kant attempts to separate human beings from the rest of nature and, as a result, permits the othering of anything that lies outside of the white male subject, including the natural environment. The trouble with placing the human above and apart from everything else is that such a framework denies the interconnectivity of all life forms and their dependence on one another.

As I have outlined in this section, there are problems with Kant's aesthetics, especially regarding the separation of the two aesthetic realms: the beautiful and the sublime. However, I argue that Kant's thinking evolved from *Observations* and, in the *Third Critique*, Kant's aesthetics offers ideas about the experience of beauty that are helpful for moral thinking. We can leave behind some of the problematic aspects of Kant's essentialism, while utilizing some of his more helpful ideas about reflective judgement and disinterested perception. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss a different interpretation of Kantian beauty and sublimity, one which reframes beauty as fair and sublimity as generative.

### **Beauty and Morality**

Despite the problems with Kant's treatment of beauty and sublimity in *Observations*, his treatment of beauty in the *Third Critique* —the association of beauty and morality —can tell us something about beauty's power to propel us toward a sense of moral goodness. I turn in this section to Scarry's discussion of beauty because she retains the helpful aspects of Kant's description of the beauty experience in the third critique while departing from some of the unhelpful aspects of Kant's earlier aesthetic philosophy as laid out in *Observations*.

In the third critique, Kant claims the sensitivity required for delighting in beauty “makes the soul fitted for virtuous impulses.”<sup>75</sup> Further, a taste for beauty enables us “to make the transition from sensible charm to a habitual moral interest ...”<sup>76</sup> In other words, attention to beauty promotes a sensibility toward esteemed regard and fairness of treatment. This notion of beauty is much evolved from the gendered and

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<sup>75</sup> Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*.

<sup>76</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 230.

racialized notion of beauty in *Observations*. Specifically, Kant's focus on beauty as *experience* in the third critique complicates the aesthetic category by making it an act of reflective judgement, rather than only a characteristic. What is unhelpful and potentially harmful about Kant's aesthetics as it is laid out in *Observations* is the division of the beautiful and the sublime and the resulting hierarchies of people and nature. What *does* seem helpful about Kant's aesthetics is the particular experiences occasioned by the sublime and the beautiful. In Kant's original configuration, either something is in harmony with our understanding and charms our senses, as in the case of beauty, or something is in violent opposition to our understanding and stirs our intellect, as in the case of the sublime. However, *both* kinds of aesthetic experiences can be helpful to arriving at moral thinking. An experience of an agency external to our own should *both* challenge our understanding *and* inspire our esteemed regard. The two experiences are, on a second glance, not that different from one another. According to Scarry, part of beauty's power lies in its unprecedentedness: the perception which takes place when one stands in the presence of beauty is that the beautiful thing is incomparable and unprecedented.<sup>77</sup> The way the beautiful thing fills the mind is completely new and draws from no prior context or association. This unprecedentedness is at the core of Kant's notion of disinterestedness.

Recall that disinterestedness is an important feature of reflective judgement. In addition to being a nonutilitarian response to a being or object, Brady also describes a disinterested attention as a sympathetic attention: "sympathetic attention refers to the way in which we direct our attention to the qualities of the object, without distraction, to enable an open and potentially absorbed response to what we experience ... we take no interest in how we might use the object for our ends."<sup>78</sup> We are prompted to ask, how can I relate to something in a way that is not instrumental to my own use but is instead passive and admiring? Similarly, Scarry draws a distinction between "passive perception—looking ... without any wish to change what one has seen (as often happens in the presence of the beautiful)" and "instrumental perception—looking ... that is prelude to intervening in, changing, what one has seen ..."<sup>79</sup> Beauty helps us toward the latter type of

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<sup>77</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 22.

<sup>78</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 24-25.

<sup>79</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 61.

perception, says Scarry. She points out that “people seem to wish there to be beauty even when their own self-interest is not served by it:”

otherwise it is inexplicable why people get so upset when they learn that a Vermeer painting has been stolen from the Gardner museum without any assurance that its surface is being protected; why people get upset about the disappearance of kelp forests they had never even heard of until the moment they were informed of the loss; why museums, schools, universities take such care that beautiful artifacts from people long in the past be safely carried forward to people in the future.<sup>80</sup>

People care about beauty existing in the world even if they never delight in its sensual charms. They still want to *know* that the beauty is out there somewhere.

Scarry suggests that some of the political and moral critiques of beauty stem from the aesthetic realms of beauty and the sublime being wrongly bifurcated. As discussed above, both Burke and Kant described the sublime as astonishing, eternal, righteous, and the beautiful as charming, small, and good-hearted. However, experiences of beauty are not always only sensually charming. They are often disorienting and perplexing, and the beholder of the beautiful is thrown into a position of vulnerability. Scarry takes Dante and his beholding of Beatrice as an example of this: when he comes face-to-face with her, he trembles violently and his senses go haywire.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the poet Rilke called beauty the beginning of terror. Perhaps if the two kinds of experience were conceived as one in the same, this would solve some of the ethical problems which often occur in the phenomenon of looking. While the ‘object’ of beauty is often taken to be the vulnerable one, is it not in fact the case that the looker is made vulnerable through the act of looking? According to Scarry, “at the moment we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentering.”<sup>82</sup> She quotes Simone Weil: this decentering prompts us “to give up our imaginary position as the center [of existence] ... A transformation then takes place at the very roots of our sensibility.”<sup>83</sup> While this kind of

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<sup>80</sup> Scarry, 123-124.

<sup>81</sup> Dante, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xv, xvi, 29, 20.

<sup>82</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 111

<sup>83</sup> Scarry quoting Weil, 111.

decentering — shattering of understanding — is attributed to only the sublime by Kant, Scarry makes a case for its attribution to the experience of the beautiful.

Scarry provides the helpful image of the sublime as tall oaks in a sacred grove and the beautiful as flowers in a meadow.<sup>84</sup> The grove and the meadow require continuity and reciprocity between them; each needs the other in order to thrive. But the bifurcation of the two realms of aesthetics

occasioned the demotion of the beautiful because it ensured that the meadow flowers, rather than being perceived in their *continuity* with the august silence of ancient groves (as they had when the two coinhabited the inclusive realm of beauty), were now seen instead as a *counterpoint* to that grove. Formerly capable of charming or astonishing, now beauty was the not-astonishing; as it was also the not-male, the not-mountainous, the not-righteous, the not-right.<sup>85</sup>

This bifurcation made beauty a counterpoint to the sublime. The disruption of continuity between the two erodes the moral thinking that aesthetic experiences can inspire. However, if the two aesthetic experiences are reconceptualized as the same experience, the small and unassuming meadow flower may be seen as just as powerful as the very large and obtrusive old oak tree. The meadow flowers may be small and diminutive, but they beckon pollinators, which make the majestic old oak groves' existence possible. Aldo Leopold conceptualizes this point in his land ethic, which proposes the concept of a biotic community.<sup>86</sup> In such a community, soil, plants, and animal species of all kinds exist in an energy circuit in which the flourishing of one kind of thing is interconnected with the flourishing of things of other kinds. Within environmental ethics, the irreplaceability of the natural environment pushes its value beyond the instrumental. Something with purely instrumental value can be easily replaced with another thing that can do the job just as well. There is no substitute for nature, not even small parts of it: even a seemingly small ecological loss has widespread repercussions. The smallness of a thing, or the degree of charm it might inspire, does not take away from its vitalness.

The recognition of *aliveness*, as Scarry puts it, is a fundamental part of the beauty experience: “this begins within the confined circumference of the beholder and the beheld who exchange a reciprocal salute to

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<sup>84</sup> Scarry, 83.

<sup>85</sup> Scarry, 84.

<sup>86</sup> Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 41-48.



the continuation of one another's existence."<sup>87</sup> The beauty experience is generative because it compels us to seek out more beauty in the world and, therefore, feeds one's responsibility to the ongoingness of existence beyond the self. For these reasons, the experience of beauty ought to be reclaimed in moral considerations. Rather than the kind of beauty experience that the bifurcated aesthetic suggests — senses charmed, imagination blissfully attuned — we ought to consider the experience of beauty as a moment of growth. Beauty is a consciousness and attunement to the not-me: a salute to the other which I may not comprehend but that I none the less confer with aliveness.

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<sup>87</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 92.

## CHAPTER THREE

### NATURE IN FRAMES: THE MISEDUCATION OF THE IDLE STARE

In the previous chapter, I discussed the implications of looking for beauty. Although looking at and for beauty can be harmful to the subject of perception, beauty is also generative of an esteemed regard. I proposed beauty as a sensibility through which to perceive the nonhuman world with the aim of bestowing esteemed regard and therefore care to the natural environment and nonhuman others. Although the frame of beauty might be the desired outcome of an education — especially one for environmental consciousness — we first must attend to existing frames. Students come into contact with the natural world and nonhuman others in a variety of scenarios. Of the embodied experiences with the nonhuman available to educational endeavors, venues such as zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens, and safaris — sometimes referred to as “nature-based edutainment” — are growing in popularity.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I argue that these venues position nonhuman animals and natural landscapes as objects of contemplation.

While the fields of environmental studies and animal ethics have charted the material implications of these venues for the ecosystems and individual beings enclosed in them, I’m interested in how such spaces work as ontological orderings — frames — for the human viewers. The zoo, as a case in point, is not so different from an art exhibit: both spaces curate *exhibits* — a term used by both zoos and art museums — meant to display an entity toward an aesthetic and sometimes educational end.<sup>2</sup> I discuss the implications of viewing nature as art, taking into consideration the harmful and helpful implications of aesthetic viewing.

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<sup>1</sup> Eric von Essen, Johan Lindsjö, and Charlotte Berg, “Instagranimal: Animal Welfare and Animal Ethics Challenges of Animal-Based Tourism,” *Animals* 10, no. 10 (2020): 1-17; Teresa Lloro-Bidart, “Reassembling the ‘Environment’: Science, Affect, and Multispecies Educative Practice at the Aquarium of the Pacific,” *Environmental Education Research* 21, no. 4 (2015): 650-651; Sarah Louise Spooner, Eric Allen Jensen, Louise Tracey, and Andrew Robert Marshall, “Evaluating the Impacts of Theatre-Based Wildlife and Conservation Education at the Zoo,” *Environmental Education Research* 25, no. 8 (2019): 1231-49.

<sup>2</sup> John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 260.

I explore the kind of viewing that zoological venues might set the terms for regarding a moral orientation to the nonhuman; namely, that they operate as a particular kind of human curation of the nonhuman, or a *frame*. Ultimately, in this chapter, I explore the implications of placing nature in *frames* for the cultivation of an ecoaesthetic sensibility. I'm interested in the ways nonhuman beings and landscapes are situated in our visual perception and the implications for an education for environmental consciousness. I propose that the frame of zoos and other venues stifle imagination because they separate the viewer from the Kantian form of nature. However, at the same time, I argue that there might be something helpful about perceiving the nonhuman world as art because art inspires appreciation.

I first look to frames as an object of study. I analyze some of the frames that exist around nonhuman animals, ecosystems, and landscapes from the point of view of institutionalized zoological and nature-based venues: what they mean, what they promote, and what the implications might be for perceiving nature as art. Then, I explore Kant and Dewey's philosophies of art and what experiences of art mean for the perceivers and perceived. I start from Kant's aesthetics in *Critique of Judgement*; specifically, the relationship Kant posits between contemplation and moral attunement. Aesthetic taste enables us, says Kant, to establish habitual moral interest. However, not all aesthetic experiences are the same for Kant: he points to a difference between an interest in *art* and an interest in *natural* beauty. The former, says Kant, is no guarantee of a compulsion toward morality, but the latter is.<sup>3</sup> I problematize this distinction and think through the implicit differences in something regarded as art and something regarded as Kantian formal beauty. In order to bring Kantian aesthetics into a conversation with aesthetic education, I look to John Dewey's reading of Kant in *Art as Experience*. Dewey troubles Kant's idea of contemplation as devoid of active attention due to its siloing of the visual experience from other sensual experiences and from surrounding material concerns. True *attention*, says Dewey, is attuned to the context — the *frame* — in which the entity exists; otherwise, the act is nothing more than an “idle stare.”<sup>4</sup> In the final section of this chapter, I propose a rethinking of the ways we frame nature. On one hand, there seems something helpful about art as a frame through which to perceive

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<sup>3</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 165-166.

<sup>4</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 1934), 265.

the nonhuman world because of the appreciation and esteemed regard the attribution “it’s a work of art!” begets. On the other hand, I argue that the frame of the zoo and like venues is miseducative because it promotes the kind of one-way gaze, or idle stare, that Dewey critiques of Kant’s aesthetics. I argue that a locational revision on the part of the human perceiver, promotes a moral orientation toward to the nonhuman world. I concede that frames are inevitable: we are always seeing the world through frames of one kind or another; however, to let them go unnoticed and unattended to would be, I argue, miseducative. In other words, a wholly disinterested or frameless kind of perception may not be possible, but there seems to be something instructive about looking for the frames that are there and how they affect the way we attend to and regard nonhuman beings.

### Frames

In the past couple of decades, communication researchers “have defined the increasingly popular concept of ‘framing’ in media and communication research” as originating “in visual analysis and as a reference to the frame delimiting and surrounding a photograph, painting or other visual representation.”<sup>5</sup> Researchers in the area of visual communication have studied the impacts of visual representation of the environment, as “the public vocabulary on the environment is to a large extent a visual vocabulary.” For example, Anders Hansen and David Machin, in their introduction to the seventh volume of *Environmental Communication*, point to different cultures of viewing the natural environment.<sup>6</sup> “These ideas,” explain Hansen and Machin, “call us to think about how visual representations of the environment point to cultures of viewing; for example, the viewing of landscapes through a romantic gaze, seeing them as representing some pristine and innocent view of nature, or seeing the planet in terms of resources that can be exploited.”<sup>7</sup> The “aestheticization of landscapes ... resonates with ... cultural discourses” on what natural spaces and the beings who inhabit them are there for and likewise assigns their value.<sup>8</sup> Hansen and Machin point out,

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<sup>5</sup> Anders Hansen & David Machin, Introduction to *Environmental Education* 7, no. 2 (2013); 159.

<sup>6</sup> Hansen & Machin, Introduction, 153.

<sup>7</sup> Hansen & Machin, 153.

<sup>8</sup> Hansen & Machin, 156.

however, that a “visual vocabulary of climate change and other environmental issues is not one that offers itself for ready recognition or with ready-made meanings, but rather one that has to be ‘constructed’.”<sup>9</sup>

The meaning-making which takes place at the behest of an image is dependent upon what Hansen and Machin call the “communicative situation” or the frame. The art exhibit is one such frame, so are zoological and nature-related venues such as zoos, aquariums, safaris, botanical gardens, national parks, and so on. I’m interested in this chapter in the perceptual frames zoos and art exhibits might share in common and what the implications are for how we perceive nature when it is positioned and curated within a particular frame.

In order to better understand the way frames order our experiences, I turn to Erving Goffman’s frame analysis. Goffman argues that nearly all public and social human interaction are situated in contextual frames. This analysis is helpful to my exploration of how humans look at nonhuman animals because our experiences of nonhuman animals are often organized with intentionality, especially in educational settings. I’m interested in the consequences of this organization for our moral relations to the nonhuman world, particularly because, according to Goffman, these organizational frameworks allow their “user[s] to locate, perceive, identify, and label ...concrete occurrences” defined in terms of the framework. Goffman defines frames as situations “built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events ... and our subjective involvement in them.”<sup>10</sup> We see everything through frames — including nature — and education forms the frames through which we see beings and objects in the world. Frames can be material — as in a literal frame around an image or work of art— or contextual — as in the invisible fourth wall of a stage play — or both — as in the material enclosure an animal exists in in a zoo but also the contextual frames through which we’re prompted to understand the animal given the context of a zoo. Even though many zoos today no longer house animals in cages or behind glass walls, the zoo itself is still a venue humans visit to view nonhumans. Although the frames surrounding animals in zoos may be less tangible than they once were in zoos of past decades, the context of the zoo as a venue still prompts visitors to understand the animal and

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<sup>9</sup> Hansen & Machin, 159.

<sup>10</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (New York: Harper, 1974), 10-11.

plant life there in particular way. If frames order our experiences, then those commonly erected around nature in educational settings ought to be attended to.

In his article “Where the Wild Things Aren’t,” David Grazian explains that venues such as zoological gardens, aquariums, natural history museums, and planetariums “employ interpretive exhibits, live demonstrations, and narrative media to furnish seemingly authentic and realistic depictions of the natural environment. In doing so, such institutions fuse together modern science with the art of storytelling and the aesthetics of visual imagination.”<sup>11</sup> Grazian addresses a challenge faced by zoos in particular: the tension between “staging ‘naturalistic’ exhibits that offer aesthetically pleasing and edifying depictions of the natural world.”<sup>12</sup> Zoos are caught between their purported educational mission and the demand that the nonhuman animals on view and their manufactured habits be aesthetically pleasing to zoo visitors — that they transform into art. Grazian describes “a particular set of strategies of impression management” employed by the zoologists and landscape architects who create the illusory world of the zoos: a “dramaturgical performance that [he] call[s] nature making.” Nature making entails the use in zoos of aesthetic conventions to replicate “what audiences collectively imagine the natural world to feel and sound like.”<sup>13</sup> Grazian also points out, however, that zoo goers are not fooled by the staged displays: “no visitor approaching an Amur tiger’s enclosure at the Philadelphia Zoo would somehow mistake its glass-walled habitat for the Siberian tundra.”<sup>14</sup> Yet, visitors give themselves over to the illusion: just as movie and stage play goers surrender themselves to the worlds of the story being created before their eyes.

What are the educational implications of making nature into art or *perceiving* nature as art? What are the moral implications of turning nonhuman animals into beings of instrumental use and placing them on the other end of the human gaze? In order to think about the moral implications of the end that “nature making” serves, Kant is helpful here.

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<sup>11</sup> David Grazian, “Where the Wild Things Aren’t: Exhibiting Nature in American Zoos,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (2012): 546.

<sup>12</sup> Grazian, “Where the Wild Things Aren’t,” 547.

<sup>13</sup> Grazian, 548.

<sup>14</sup> Grazian, 547.

### Kant on the Amorality of the Art Collector

Kant, in his explanation of aesthetic judgment, draws a distinction between art and nature. The result of a piece of art is a work (*opus*), whereas the result of a phenomenon in nature is an effect (*effectus*). Hence, we call a painting a *work* of art. In other words, art is associated with the doing of human hands; nature exists on its own, regardless of human activity. According to Kant, something can only be called a work of art if it was made with intention: someone must *decide* and *intend* to make art. Although Kant concedes that we sometimes refer to natural phenomena as works of art — he poses the bee’s honeycomb as an example — we do so only by way of an analogy, as the labor of the bee was not based on rational deliberation.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the honeycomb is a product of the bee’s *nature* and, therefore, not truly a work of art. We call nature beautiful, says Kant, if it resembles art, and art can be labeled *fine* only if it looks like an effect of nature: the study and technique of the artist is not apparent to the viewer; it appears as though it is exactly as nature would have intended it. Moreover, *fine art* as opposed to *mechanical art*, the kind found in galleries and museums, invokes reflective powers of judgment, not only sensual agreeableness.<sup>16</sup> The ultimate distinction between nature and art for Kant is one of form versus presentation: “a natural beauty is a *beautiful thing*; artistic beauty is a *beautiful presentation* of a thing.”<sup>17</sup>

The heavy consequence for this distinction is that Kant ties aesthetic and moral judgement together: he sees discernment of beauty as analogous to moral thinking. Kant claims that beauty in both nature and art are symbolic of moral thinking and “seem to presuppose that we are judging morally.”<sup>18</sup> However, for Kant, natural beauty is superior to beauty found in art because only judgements of beauty in nature arouse a direct interest.<sup>19</sup> The reason for this has much to do with Kant’s view of art as presentation rather than form. Kant argued that “an interest in the beautiful generally” is not a sign of good moral character.<sup>20</sup> For instance, an

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<sup>15</sup> I’m not satisfied with the way Kant is characterizing the interior of the bee, but this isn’t relevant here.

<sup>16</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 170-74

<sup>17</sup> Kant, 179.

<sup>18</sup> Kant, 230.

<sup>19</sup> Kant, 166.

<sup>20</sup> Kant, 165

interest in the *beautiful in art* (including the use of beautiful objects in nature for adorning and decorating, “and hence for vanity’s sake”) is not indication for Kant that someone’s way of thinking is morally good.<sup>21</sup> Only a *direct interest* in the beauty of *nature* “is always a mark of a good soul.” Moreover, this interest must be habitually associated with the *contemplation of nature*. This, thinks Kant, “indicates at least a mental attunement favorable to moral feeling.”

For Kant, an *aesthetic* judgement is the ability to judge forms without the use concepts:

In order to judge a natural beauty to be that, I need not have a prior concept of what kind of thing the object is [meant] to be; i.e., I do not have to know its material purposiveness (its purpose). Rather, I like the mere form of the object when I judge it, on its own account and without knowing the purpose.<sup>22</sup>

By concepts, Kant means the characteristics and attributes of an object as such. To make an aesthetic judgment is “to feel in the mere judging of these forms a liking that we also make a rule for everyone.” Although this judgement is disinterested — not based on any prior association of notion or use — it gives rise to an interest in that when we judge something beautiful, we expect that others will make the same judgement. When we take a liking to the form of beauty, the judgement becomes intellectual as the liking is made universal: “a liking that we make a law for everyone; this judgement [too] is not based on any interest, *yet it gives rise to one.*” In other words, a judgement of taste is not on its own a moral judgment, but if in our judgement we determine something to be beautiful, this determination has a universalizing power that pushes the judgement beyond taste and makes it a moral judgement.<sup>23</sup> If a judgment is merely a matter of taste, then the experience stays at the sensual level: the senses are charmed. But if the judgment is one of forms, then it becomes intellectual and gives rise to a direct interest.

Kant poses the following scenario as worthy of dissection with regard to direct interest in the *form* of nature rather than the sensual charm of it: suppose we play a trick on a lover of beauty in which we stick fake flowers in the ground and hang paper birds from tree branches, and these fakes are convincing enough to

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<sup>21</sup> Kant, 165-166.

<sup>22</sup> Kant, 179.

<sup>23</sup> Kant, 167



fool the lover of beauty for a time. Suppose, then, the lover of beauty discovers the deceit. According to Kant, “the direct interest he previously took in these things would promptly vanish ... [and] be replaced by a different interest, an interest of vanity, to use these things to decorate his room for the eyes of others.” What this example illustrates is that the perception of beauty in nature that is accompanied by intuition and reflection is a direct interest. Whereas, if we found ourselves to be looking at a copy of something in nature — fake flowers, for example — we are left with a judgement of taste, which is only concerned with preference or agreeableness, not true beauty. In order for an interest to be direct, it must be concerned with a thing in and of itself; in other words, completely devoid of societally established contexts or associations. For Kant, “an interest which refers to society ... [has] no safe indication of a morally good way of thinking.”<sup>24</sup> Put differently, an aesthetic experience must transcend societal associations in order to be truly beautiful, and art, thinks Kant, is always associated with society. Either art imitates nature and is therefore deceptive — and this deception will result only in an indirect interest in “the underlying cause” of the work of art: “an interest in art can interest us only by its purpose and never in itself.”<sup>25</sup> Dewey takes this idea to task as I discuss in the next section.

Kant’s fake flower and paper bird scenario reminds me of how Grazian describes the “immersive landscaping and elaborate stagecraft” zoos use to display animals in “settings that mimic dramatic natural environments.”<sup>26</sup> If we follow Kant’s logic, zoogoers are not experiencing a direct interest in nature. Either they are deceived, or they accept the nonhuman beings as mere means to the ends of their education or entertainment, in other words, as instrumental. However, as I discussed earlier, bestowing something the attribute “work of art” begets appreciation and esteemed regard. Art is precious and its care and preservation are a ubiquitous part of human social practices. In Elaine Scarry’s language, beauty in art positions the viewer to bestow a landscape or a being with “perceptual acuity” and esteemed regard.” When art is the frame

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<sup>24</sup> Kant, 166.

<sup>25</sup> Kant, 168.

<sup>26</sup> Grazian, “Where the Wild Things Aren’t,” 552.

through which we see nature, this might prompt a moral attunement to the being or landscape placed inside the frame. According to Scarry, people care greatly for beauty as it exists in both art and in a natural state

otherwise it is inexplicable why people get so upset when they learn that a Vermeer painting has been stolen from the Gardner museum without any assurance that its surface is being protected; why people get upset about the disappearance of kelp forests they had never even heard of until the moment they were informed of the loss; why museums, schools, universities take such care that beautiful artifacts from people long in the past be safely carried forward to people in the future.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, when regarded as works of art, nonhuman others and landscapes are bestowed with esteemed regard and merit moral treatment and ethical fairness. But the frames must be right. As Arnold Berleant describes, “It is difficult to collect landscapes as we collect paintings, and so we must be content to visit scenic places ... [to revise our location, in Scarry’s language] ... collecting, if you will, experiences of landscape.”<sup>28</sup> As I discuss in the final section of this chapter, the wrong kinds of frames veer into what Kant is describing as cheap imitation and vanity. However, I wonder if there is an important difference between the kind of art Kant was envisioning — likely framed neoclassical paintings — and art of the centuries that followed, especially twentieth-century minimalist art which is not contained in frames but rather often intended to be experienced as a part of a natural environment. What potential do the frameless qualities of these latter art forms bring to a moral orientation toward the nonhuman world? Perhaps it is the framed existence of art — as it appears on the walls of museums, castles, and great halls — that prompted Kant to discount it as “a mental attunement favorable to moral feeling.”<sup>29</sup> Kant associated this kind of interest in the beautiful with a collector’s sense of pride and vanity.

To be sure, Kant distinguishes between beauty in art and beauty in nature on the grounds of the latter’s subjective purposiveness that morally-attuned persons will find interesting: when we experience a thing in nature, it feels as though this thing and our mental powers are in perfect harmony — it seems to us that this thing has a formal purpose, even if, in fact, it does not. However, Kant concedes that when we judge

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<sup>27</sup> Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 123-124.

<sup>28</sup> Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 15.

<sup>29</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 166.

a person, nonhuman animal, or landscape by its purposiveness “the judgement is no longer purely aesthetic, no longer a mere judgement of taste. We then judge nature no longer as it appears as art, but insofar as it actually *is* art (though superhuman art).”<sup>30</sup> This point is the one Dewey takes most issue with, as Dewey contends art as such must necessarily be regarded with its material conditions in mind. For Dewey, in order for an experience to be aesthetic, meaning-making must be involved: “the recognition of relationships — that is, perception, or the making of meaning — is what gives an experience its satisfying emotional quality. It is what makes an experience aesthetic.”<sup>31</sup> For Dewey, art requires the application of knowledge from prior experience and associations, “as opposed to random, disassociated thoughts or feelings; it derives from the ability to recognize relationships among elements, to create meaning.”<sup>32</sup> Dewey did consider the cultivation of a particular mode of perception important to an aesthetic experience, though his ends were different from Kant’s.

### **Dewey on Kant: An Anemic Conception of Art**<sup>33</sup>

In this section, I problematize Kant’s thinking on art: that a work of art is not an object in itself but an imitation of a form found in nature; therefore, any admiration of it is either deception or vanity. I argue instead that there might be a way in which art is a useful educational frame because it begets care and esteemed regard; therefore, it might be a helpful frame through which to perceive the nonhuman world toward an education for environmental consciousness. I turn in this section to Dewey’s thoughts on art and education, primarily in *Art as Experience*.

Like many thinkers before him, Dewey found aesthetic experience and the cultivation of taste to be important to an education because it contributes to the power of appreciation. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey writes, “... the formation of habits is a purely mechanical thing unless habits are also *tastes* — habitual

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<sup>30</sup> Kant, 179.

<sup>31</sup> Tracie E. Constantino, “Training Aesthetic Perception: John Dewey on the Educational Role of Art Museums,” *Educational Theory* 54, no. 4 (2004): 403.

<sup>32</sup> Constantino, “Training Aesthetic Perception,” 404.

<sup>33</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 264.

modes of preference and esteem ...” Further, in his essay, “Appreciation and Cultivation,” Dewey maintained that the trouble with an education that does not account for an aesthetic sensibility or a refined taste “is that material is not committed to *heart*; it is only entrusted to some portion of the cerebrum. In consequence, personal cultivation is not attained.”<sup>34</sup> Although Dewey places importance on aesthetics for education, in *Art as Experience*, he has a different interpretation from Kant of the aesthetic experience and how we frame our perceptions of the world around us, and the use of these frames. I see three points of departure of Dewey’s interpretation of aesthetic experience from Kant: substance and form, imagination, and contemplation. These three points of departure are significant because they are each modes of engagement with the nonhuman world that zoological venues ask of viewers. In the case of “nature making,” described by Grazian, viewers are asked to view and sometimes physically engage with the manufactured habitats of animals and landscapes on display (the substance of the exhibits) and to, significantly, accept their realness though they are formally inaccurate in the Kantian sense. Therefore, imagination is key in zoological scenarios. There seems to be an important connection between Dewey’s and Kant’s opposing ideas about imagination and the imagining zoos and like institutions are asking of us. Finally, the act of contemplation is both important to the educational enterprise broadly and is the primary means of engagement with the natural world in zoos. Above all else we might do in a zoo, aquarium, or botanical garden, we look. I take each of these modes of engagement in turn in the subsections that follow.

### *Substance and Form*

Dewey claims that reconciling form and substance in art is not the problem that other thinkers have found it to be. He does, however, draw a distinction between the expressive and the decorative: “the expressive inclines to the side of meaning, the decorative to that of sense.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, there is a distinction for Dewey between a work of art that aims to express a meaning and mere decoration which aims to please the senses. Whereas Kant considered all human-hand-crafted art to be merely decorative: where an

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<sup>34</sup> Kazuyo Nakamura, “The Significance of Dewey’s Aesthetics in Art Education in the Age of Globalization,” *Educational Theory* 59, no. 4 (2009); 431.

<sup>35</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 129.

attunement to moral conviction is concerned, it is a cheap attempt at imitating the form of beauty that only occurs in nature. For Kant, if something exemplifies the form of beauty, it exists in a liminal space between agreeable sensuousness and intellectual goodness. Whereas, according to Dewey, aesthetic experiences are necessarily the union of sensory experiences and an understanding of the qualities of the surrounding environs in which one lives: “the connection of qualities with objects is intrinsic in all experience having significance.”<sup>36</sup> If the connection between sense experiences and the qualities of objects in the world is eliminated, says Dewey, all that remains is a “succession of transitory thrills.”<sup>37</sup> Educational moments — moments in which the senses are abruptly and powerfully drawn to an object of attention — “incite curiosity to inquire into the nature of the situation.”<sup>38</sup> Without the ability to connect the sensory experience with a property of an object, the object is far removed from what could be called an aesthetic enjoyment. In other words, one main point of departure between Dewey and Kant’s aesthetics is that sensory experience is not concerned with formal beauty, whereas Dewey claims that “to make the pathology of sensation the basis of esthetic enjoyment is not a promising undertaking” because the connection between the materiality of the world and experience is the site of educative growth.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, Dewey takes issue with Kant’s taxonomizing sense experience as high and low: sight, for Kant, is the sense through which a truly aesthetic experience is possible. For Dewey, the unity of all sense organs “is found in the cooperative roles they play in active and receptive relations to the environment.”<sup>40</sup> When the sensory elements of experiences are separated, an experience becomes one-sided.

### *Imagination*

Like Kant, Dewey agrees that an aesthetic experience takes place when the imagination is at play with its surroundings. However, he argues that the nature of imagination has been oft misinterpreted. For Dewey,

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<sup>36</sup> Dewey, 130.

<sup>37</sup> Dewey, 130.

<sup>38</sup> Dewey, 131.

<sup>39</sup> Dewey, 131.

<sup>40</sup> Dewey, 262.

“all *conscious* experience has of necessity some degree of imaginative quality.” Dewey defines experience as “the interaction of a live creature with its environment,” but “that experience becomes conscious, a matter of perception, only when meanings enter it that are derived from prior experience;”<sup>41</sup> this association of the current interaction with prior experience is the work of imagination. Importantly, though, in order for growth to occur, there must be some disruption between past and present experience, says Dewey: “When past and present fit exactly into one another, when there is only recurrence, complete uniformity, the resulting experience is routine and mechanical; it does not come to consciousness in perception.”<sup>42</sup> For Kant, the sublime causes such a disruption: an experience of the sublime is violent toward our understanding of nature and therefore invokes a sense of wonder. Though, for Kant, an experience of the sublime causes imagination and reason to clash, while an experience of the beautiful harmonizes imagination and understanding. Kant leaves beauty at the level of sensual charm because it does not cause such a rupture as an experience of the sublime. Goffman describes frames as working in a similar way to Kant’s description of experiences with beauty: frames pacify our perception in a way that causes experience to fade into the background of consciousness.<sup>43</sup> However, thinkers such as Elaine Scarry and Bonnie Mann have argued that beauty and the sublime were wrongly bifurcated by Kant.<sup>44</sup> An aesthetic experience has the power to please and disrupt; pacify and invoke change. For Dewey, the imaginative phase of experience disrupts “the inertia of habit” and “overrides adaption of the meaning of the here and now with that of experiences, without which there is no consciousness.”<sup>45</sup> While Kant understood imagination as having no purpose outside the imaginative experience — only “free play” — Dewey understands imagination as the mind’s way of bringing past and present experience into an integral whole.<sup>46</sup> Imagination is not for Dewey, as it is for Kant, “a special and self-

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<sup>41</sup> Dewey, 283.

<sup>42</sup> Dewey, 284.

<sup>43</sup> Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*; Bonnie Mann, *Women’s Liberation and the Sublime: Feminism, Postmodernism, Environment* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 284.

<sup>46</sup> Dewey, 278.

contained faculty;” it is rather, the “blending of interests at the point where the mind comes into contact with the world.”<sup>47</sup>

### *Contemplation*

Dewey takes issue with the association of aesthetics with contemplation. He surmises that Kant’s prioritization of contemplation reflects the “tendencies of the eighteenth century,” which emphasized reason rather than passion; objectivity, order, and regularity were “exclusively the source of esthetic satisfaction.”<sup>48</sup> Dewey calls this way of relating to art one-sided: it sees perception of art as having only to do with recognition followed by prolonged contemplation and pleasure. According to Dewey, eighteenth century art was representative rather than expressive: “the subject-matter represented is of a ‘rational’ nature — regular and recurrent elements and phases of existence,”<sup>49</sup> as opposed to the impressionist and abstract expressionist art of the following centuries. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey recounts this Kantian contemplation and traces it back to ancient Greece: for the ancient Greeks, objects of contemplative insight were the only means through which to transcend from “need, labor, and matter. They alone were self-sufficient, self-existent, and self-explanatory, and hence enjoyment of *them* was on a higher plane than enjoyment of works of art.” The reason for this was that the term *artist* in ancient Greece had none of the connotation that it does in contemporary society; art was more closely associated with an *artisan*, an inferior position, “works of art” did not meet the criteria for an object of contemplative insight, as they do today.

Dewey points out that in post-modern society, we have a more “messy” understanding of knowledge and reality:

Knowledge is still regarded by most thinkers as direct grasp of ultimate reality, although the practice of knowing has been assimilated to the procedure of the useful arts; — involving, that is to say, doing that manipulates and arranges natural energies. Again while science is said to lay hold of reality, yet “art” instead of being assigned a lower rank is equally esteemed and honored. And when within art a distinction is drawn between production and appreciation, the chief honor usually goes to the former on the ground that it is “creative,”

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<sup>47</sup> Dewey, 278.

<sup>48</sup> Dewey, 263-4.

<sup>49</sup> Dewey, 263.

while taste is relatively possessive and passive, dependent for its material upon the activities of the creative artist.<sup>50</sup>

Dewey maintains that if Kant's idea of contemplation and notion of art were temporally generalized, "it's absurdity [becomes] evident." Kantian aesthetic judgement, says Dewey, subordinates seeking and thinking "to the perfecting of the process of perception itself ... To define the emotional element of esthetic perception merely as the pleasure taken in the act of contemplation ..." This, for Dewey, "results in a thoroughly anemic conception of art."<sup>51</sup> Berleant agrees that perception is inextricably tied to experience and sociocultural context: according to Berleant,

a crucial fact about aesthetic experience of both art and environment ... is that aesthetic valuation is not a purely personal experience, 'subjective,' as it is often mistakenly called, but a social one. In engaging aesthetically with environment as with art, the knowledge, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes we have are largely social, cultural, and historical in origin.<sup>52</sup>

As many have pointed out, experiences of beauty and aesthetic experiences broadly are more than the invocation of feelings of pleasure and delight. Dewey himself quotes Goethe who makes this point: "Art is formative long before it is beautiful ..." <sup>53</sup> Therefore, for Dewey, the trouble with Kantian aesthetic judgement is that it closes a contemplative experience in on itself, as if the singular moment of perception between subject and object and the resulting pleasure were all that counts. Dewey, on the other hand, interprets all experience, including aesthetic experiences, as involving "an element of seeking, of pressing forward." In other words, something must *happen* in the attitude and understanding of the individual having the aesthetic experience for it to be such. True attention must be paid to the being or scene at the other end of the perceptual gaze: "a contemplation that is not an aroused and intensified form of attention to material in perception presented through the senses is an idle stare."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 2018). 257.

<sup>51</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 264.

<sup>52</sup> Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, quoting Goethe, 392.

<sup>54</sup> Dewey, 265



Moreover, Dewey points out that this understanding of art excludes any mediums other than painting and drawing, such as architecture.<sup>55</sup> Art went on to be much more than paintings which sought representatively precise imitation of the natural environment; art became impressionistic and expressive, works of art became not only depictions of other objects in the world but objects in themselves. Moreover, certain genres of sculptural art, such as the minimalist art of the mid-twentieth century, sought to commune with its surrounding environments and celebrate natural landscapes rather than merely imitate them. I discuss such artforms in the following chapter.

### **Nature in Frames: An Aesthetic for Environmental Consciousness**

In this section, I bring Dewey's thoughts on Kant into the conversation of the zoological venue industry and environmental education literature. I propose that the problem with the frame of the zoo is that it promotes the kind of looking that Dewey criticized of Kant's aesthetics: one-sided, removed from material circumstances and concerns; in other words, an idle stare. However, I think there is something helpful about both Dewey's *and* Kant's aesthetics for an education for environmental consciousness. Kant's idea of a direct interest or a disinterested pleasure is helpful for rethinking both the human moral orientation toward the nonhuman world and for thinking through an ethical relationality between humans and the more-than-human. While Kant does not grant anything in nature (the non-human) inherent moral value, he does think that a non-instrumental interest in nature makes a person pre-disposed to moral thinking. At the same time, Dewey's notion that true attention involves the unification of all senses with one's surrounding environment is helpful for understanding the ways in which we understand the qualitative world: this is the kind of imagination that art inspires.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, *art* as a frame through which to perceive the nonhuman — or viewing the nonhuman as art — might have something to offer an environmental sensibility after all.

When I propose art as a frame through which to perceive nonhuman nature, I do not mean that nature should be placed behind a metaphorical museum rope such that humans stand apart from and admire it at a distance as something wholly separate from themselves. For this reason, I find Dewey's

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<sup>55</sup> Dewey, 264.

<sup>56</sup> Nakamura, "The Significance of Dewey's Aesthetics," 430.

problematization of Kant's aesthetics to be helpful, as Dewey emphasizes the importance of the connection of living creatures to their environment. The notion of the self, says Dewey, is necessarily tied to that which surrounds it, and that to pathologize these ties is to inhibit experience and therefore educative growth. With all of this in mind, I propose that the frame of zoos and other edutainment venues in fact stifle imagination because they separate the viewer from the Kantian form of nature. At the same time, I argue that there might be something helpful about perceiving the nonhuman world as art because art, as Dewey claims, inspires appreciation. I agree with both Kant and Dewey that formal beauty inspires a generative kind of imagination that leads to an unfolding of the consciousness. I propose a rethinking of the ways we frame nature: an engagement with the nonhuman world that requires a locational revision on the part of the human perceiver.

As discussed at the opening of this chapter, the manner in which we look at nature and nonhuman others and the frames through which we see them matters greatly where a moral orientation is concerned. Zoos are a case in point in which idle contemplation and displaced imagination promote a miseducated understanding of the nonhuman. During the nineteenth century and especially during the industrial revolution, nonhuman animals began to recede from day-to-day human contact. Public zoos came into existence at the beginning of this period. According to Berger, the zoos of today “to which people go to meet animals, to observe them, to see them, is ... a monument to the impossibility of such encounters.”<sup>57</sup> In a zoo, the nonhuman animals and the flora of their manufactured habitats are enclosed — or, *framed*. These frames are material — literally there — in the form of enclosures, but they also exist in the Goffman sense as rhetorical means of organizing the experiences of the zoogoers. This kind of perception is not a truly aesthetic experience. As Nakamura explains in an article on Dewey's aesthetics, “... an experience that is aesthetic cannot be produced solely by a perceiver, a work of art, or the artist, since each is related to the others and must necessarily work in unison.”<sup>58</sup> The perceiver's relationship to the perceived is crucial; they must be reciprocally related in order for the experience to be aesthetic. Zoos are an exemplar of what Kant calls an “indirect interest.” Says Kant, a person takes a direct interest in something only if she “would not

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<sup>57</sup> Berger, *About Looking*, 258.

<sup>58</sup> Nakamura, “The Significance of Dewey's Aesthetics,” 434.

want nature to be entirely without [it] even if they provided [her] no prospect of benefit.” Not only does this person “like nature’s product for its form, but [she] also likes its existence, even though no charm of sense is involved; and [she] also does not connect that existence with any purpose whatever.”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the interest in nature and its beauty is purely intrinsic, and not instrumental, as the interest transcends sensual charms. Scarry thinks something similar. She points out that “people seem to wish there to be beauty even when their own self-interest is not served by it.”<sup>60</sup> People care about beauty existing in the world even if they never come into direct empirical contact with it — even if they never delight in its sensual charms. They still want to *know* that the beauty is out there somewhere. This, for Kant, is an interest in the form of beauty. Similarly, Scarry draws a distinction between “passive perception — looking ... without any wish to change what one has seen (as often happens in the presence of the beautiful)” and “instrumental perception — looking ... that is prelude to intervening in, changing, what one has seen ...”<sup>61</sup>

Kant’s notion of a disinterested and noninstrumental pleasure, as well as Scarry’s of a passive perception, are both Platonic takes on the experience of beauty. In Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium*, in order not to confuse *love for* with *possession of*, she explains that one can pursue the good by merely being in the presence of beauty.<sup>62</sup> Perceiving earthly beauties is like climbing stairs up to the form of beauty, or pure goodness, without desire to keep or look at forever — it is a contemplation that is disinterested.<sup>63</sup> On Caranfa’s read of this passage, “To ‘look at’ and ‘to be with’ is nothing but a state of contemplation, of an intimate communion with beauty, which alone nourishes the soul. In this state, the soul is completely attentive to the beautiful and the good.”<sup>64</sup> In addition, Berleant writes, “possession, in landscape as in love, is a manifestation of power, not appreciation. Both sacrifice intrinsic, aesthetic value to an outside purpose that

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<sup>59</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 166.

<sup>60</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 123.

<sup>61</sup> Scarry, 61.

<sup>62</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff, trans. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1989), 206B-C.

<sup>63</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 211C-D.

<sup>64</sup> Caranfa, “Contemplative Instruction,” 464.

is much less reputable.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the case may be that an instrumental perception of nature inhibits growth, where a passive perception or a Kantian direct interest inspires an infinite unfolding elevated by Dewey’s take on aesthetics which seeks to unify the present sensual experience with the surrounding environment in order to understand how empirical elements work together.

Randy Malamud importantly calls the kind of looking which takes place in zoos *spectatorship*, arguing that this way of seeing animals is “inhibitive, rather than generative, of the creative experience and appreciation of nature.”<sup>66</sup> I find the language Malamud uses to describe zoos as eerily antithetical to the inclination toward creation that Scarry takes beauty to inspire: she writes, “beautiful things have a forward momentum, the way they incite the desire to bring new things into the world.”<sup>67</sup> Whereas Malamud is saying something like the way that animals are situated in a zoo is stifling to a creative impulse, which beauty certainly is the opposite. But it seems the case that we do find nonhumans animals beautiful, otherwise why would we take such pains to put them in places like zoos and aquariums such that they are available for our viewing pleasure. What are we to make of Malamud’s claim that the spectatorship prompted by zoos inhibits creativity and appreciation of nature? I propose that it has something to do with the particular frame of the zoo.

I am not arguing that animals confined to zoos or any other human institution are discounted from being beautiful because of their existence in frames. What I’m questioning is whether the kind of looking for which zoos set the terms is what Scarry calls a “miseducated version of the typically generous-hearted impulse” of replication that beauty begets.<sup>68</sup> Scarry takes beauty to be a source of forward creative momentum which inspires us to make more beautiful things and put them in the world. But here, she is saying that this impulse can be distorted and become something else— something destructive. Rather than the “deeply beneficent momentum toward replication” that Scarry takes beauty to provoke, the looking that

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<sup>65</sup> Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, 15.

<sup>66</sup> Randy Malamud, *Reading Zoos: Representations of Animals and Captivity* (New York University Press, 1998), 226.

<sup>67</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 46.

<sup>68</sup> Scarry, 6.

zoos prompt “gives rise to material cupidity and possessiveness.”<sup>69</sup> Put simply, creativity becomes possessiveness when the beautiful is seen through the wrong kind of frame. This potential miseducation is an important one to interrogate because zoos and other institutions of this ilk assert their educational and environmental significance in society, and they shape many individuals’ relationships to, orientations toward, and knowledge of nonhuman animals and their spaces.

Grazian proposes that “the simple procedure of locating the animal in a position or location superior to the viewer may relatively pre-dispose the viewer to want to learn from the animal, be more attentive to it, and perhaps be even more respectful of it.”<sup>70</sup> He explains that sometimes zoologists will “strategically elevate exhibit spaces above public viewing areas, thereby placing visitors in a spatially subordinate position relative to animals on display.” This, however, is still an act of curation, not organic exposure.

As aforementioned, beauty prompts a passive perception: a desire only to be near to, to contemplate, and admire the thing perceived; not to change or possess. An example of the “passive perception” that Scarry associates with morality (and the direct interest Kant associates with morality), is an activity like birdwatching. Unlike the zoogoer, the birdwatcher is not looking through a frame in the same way because of the locational revision involved in the act of birdwatching.<sup>71</sup> Birds in this case are not lifted from their habitats and placed in proximity to human beings; the human looker must instead revise her location in order to catch a glimpse of the bird.

Scholar, artist, and birdwatcher Jenny Odell, describes birdwatching as “the opposite of looking something up online.” Rather than conjuring up the thing it is you hope to know about, literally summoning it to the fore of your perception, the birdwatcher instead has to revise their location, to use Scarry’s language,

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<sup>69</sup> Scarry, 7.

<sup>70</sup> Grazian, “Where the Wild Things Aren’t,” 556.

<sup>71</sup> I have in mind here not the medieval trap-and-kill style of birdwatching but something like the kind proposed by the Feminist Bird Club established by Molly Adams: <https://www.feministbirdclub.org/about>. Molly Adams, “Communicating Interdependence: Ecological Thinking and the Natural History Museum,” MA thesis, (Pratt Institute, 2012).

in order to immerse themselves in the environment of the birds and wait. Odell writes that the name of the activity should be changed to bird noticing because, as she puts it,

You can't really look *for* birds; you can't make a bird come out and identify itself to you. The most you can do is walk quietly and wait until you hear something, and then stand motionless under a tree, using your animal senses to figure out where and what it is.<sup>72</sup>

Odell describes this kind of observation changing the “granularity of [one’s] perception.” The reward of an activity like birdwatching is “a heightened sense of receptivity and a reversal of our usual cultural training, which teaches us to quickly analyze and judge more than to simply observe.”<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, spaces like zoos, which function similarly to drawing up information on the internet (in fact, there are actually online virtual zoos) — the zoogoer isn’t invited to notice and observe but rather is told what to think of the creatures that appear before them in an environment that functions as a cheapened attempt at replication of the one in which they might naturally be found. As Berger points out,

A zoo is a place where as many species and varieties of animals as possible are collected in order that they can be seen, observed, studied ... Yet in the zoo the view is always wrong. Like an image out of focus ... It’s not a dead object you have come to look at, it’s alive. It’s leading its own life. Why should this coincide with its being properly visible?<sup>74</sup>

Whereas the passive and sustained observation of birdwatching comes closer to how we actually see the world around us. In a chapter in her book *How To Do Nothing*, Odell quotes the artist David Hockney describing the phenomenology of seeing: his interpretation of organic human perception is that it is cognizant but discontinuous, “not all at once but rather in discrete, separate glimpses, which we then build up into continuous experience of the world.”<sup>75</sup> Like catching only a glimpse of a bird fluttering nearby, out of the corner of the eye, understanding, empathy, and admiration arise from organic exposure, not from looking at a being placed before us by human agency and misguided effort. According to Scarry, part of beauty’s power lies in its unprecedentedness: the perception which takes place when one stands in the presence of beauty is

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<sup>72</sup> Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2019), 7-8.

<sup>73</sup> Odell, *How to Do Nothing*, 7.

<sup>74</sup> Berger, *About Looking*, 261.

<sup>75</sup> Odell quoting Hockney, *How to Do Nothing*, 98.

that the beautiful thing is incomparable and unprecedented.<sup>76</sup> The way the beautiful thing fills the mind is completely new and draws from no prior context or association, or, as Scarry puts it, “breaks all *frames*.”<sup>77</sup> This attention to and consideration of the frames through which we see the nonhuman and its relationship to beauty and morality is an important idea to consider for an education which promotes a more moral orientation toward the nonhuman world.

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<sup>76</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 22.

<sup>77</sup> Scarry, 23, emphasis mine.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ART EDUCATION AS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Many have pointed out the educational benefits of art. Elliot Eisner has said of the use of art in education that when we “learn in and through the arts we become more qualitatively intelligent.” Responding to the early trends in the history of education in the United States, in which psychology was the mode de jour of understanding how students learn and therefore might best be educated, Eisner points out that figures such as William James and John Dewey were skeptical of this view from the start. However, the view of education as a science of social efficiency won the day:

In the process science and art became estranged. Science was considered dependable, the artistic process was not. Science was cognitive, the arts were emotional. Science was teachable, the arts required talent. Science was testable, the arts were matters of preference. Science was useful and the arts were ornamental. It was clear to many then as it is to many today which side of the coin mattered . . . one relied on art when there was no science to provide guidance. Art was a fallback position.<sup>1</sup>

However, Eisner notes that these ideas go back further than the early twentieth century in the United States: the desire to “to use what one learned about nature in order to harness it” is a product of Enlightenment era rationality and informed Kant’s thinking on aesthetic judgement. Kant’s aesthetics marked a major modern shift in thought about the epistemic status and moral significance of art.<sup>2</sup> For Kant, though aesthetic perception may aspire to a degree of objectivity, it doesn’t count as a source of knowledge — “at least in anything like the sense or respects of empirical or moral judgements.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elliot Eisner, “What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education?” Retrieved from <https://infed.org/mobi/what-can-education-learn-from-the-arts-about-the-practice-of-education/>.

<sup>2</sup> David Carr, “Dangerous Knowledge: On the Epistemic and Moral Significance of Arts in Education,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 3 (2010): 4.

<sup>3</sup> Carr, “Dangerous Knowledge,” 4.



Further,

...on this view, to regard or appreciate a work of art as a source of knowledge—about how things are in the world, human experience, or what is morally right or wrong—is essentially *not* to regard it as a work of art. On the contrary, aesthetic judgements are directed precisely at the appreciation of artworks for their own sake, which seems to mean—or has been widely interpreted as meaning—largely in terms of their “intrinsic” properties of form.<sup>4</sup>

However, the epistemic status and moral significance of art does seem important to “the *educational* status or value of the arts.”<sup>5</sup> If pleasure in or appreciation of art is indeed entirely subjective and a matter of personal preference — a view that theories of value relativism endorse — then there can be no basis for an art-based education because there is no correct or incorrect way to understand art. However, according to scholar of art education David Carr, “much of this flies in the face of a time-honored view that there are deep connections between human pleasure and knowledge.” Therefore, art may be epistemically and morally significant in at least two respects: it may “serve to extend knowledge in a variety of fields of human interest and concern ... [and] also ... involve different ways of knowing or understanding the world.”<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, to return to Eisner, “The arts teach students to act and to judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feel, to pay attention to nuance, to act and appraise the consequences of one’s choices and to revise and then to make other choices.”<sup>7</sup> Dewey as well argues in *Art as Experience* that “imagination is the chief instrument of the good.” And further, “Art has been the means of keeping alive the sense of purposes that outrun evidence and of meanings that transcend indurated habit.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the study and appreciation of art has moral significance and ought to be a part of education not only toward pleasure and entertainment but toward an education for ethical treatment of others as well. Furthermore, when we enjoy works of art, we not only try to understand the imaginative qualities employed by the artist, but we also activate our own imaginative capacities. Imagination, as philosophers of art education have pointed out, has a place in many

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<sup>4</sup> Carr, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Carr, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Carr, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Eisner, “What Can Education Learn from the Arts.”

<sup>8</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York:Penguin, 1934), 362.

other human experiences: when we envisage possibilities, or conjure to mind a person or thing that is absent from present perception, or, and most importantly, when we attempt to understand another person's feelings.<sup>9</sup> This is the aspect of imagination that aids in moral thinking. When students engage with art and activate their imaginative qualities, their capacities for empathy and compassion are nurtured. However, according to philosopher of education Claudia Ruitenberg, "such use of art in education is still limited and superficial, focusing on art's decorative and instrumental function and ignoring the significant and powerful impact art can exert on students' development as human beings."<sup>10</sup> I argue in this chapter for an intentionality with regard to the presentation and engagement with various artforms in educational settings: namely, an engagement with art that does not privilege amenity, utility, or meaning-making but rather *appreciation*. I argue further that this engagement with art be extended to an appreciation of nonhuman beings and environments toward moral regard. If the value and appreciation placed on works of art were a model for ethical treatment of the nonhuman, then an education for environmental consciousness is possible.

In this chapter, I trouble Kant's idea that an appreciation of art is not an indication of a soul fit for morality. Kant claims that a taste for beauty in nature is associated with moral goodness. However, for Kant, all beauty is analogous to moral goodness, and some "successful" works of art express aesthetic ideas that have moral significance. In fact, for Kant, *fine* art (or art that is most successful) is a product of nature rather than human agency: this is possible because of *genius*. Kant defines genius as "the innate mental predisposition through which nature gives the rule to art."<sup>11</sup> If the artwork is a work of genius, the artist "does not know how [she] came by the ideas for it; nor is it in [her] power to devise such products at [her will.]"<sup>12</sup> Genius is not a product of human will, but rather a product of nature. Therefore, I conclude that even within Kant's association of moral thinking with a direct interest in beauty in nature, that an appreciation of beauty in art has the power to influence moral treatment of the nonhuman. I will argue that there *is* something morally

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<sup>9</sup> Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 146.

<sup>10</sup> Claudia Ruitenberg, "Learning to Live with Art," *Philosophy of Education* (2002): 247.

<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 174.

<sup>12</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 175.

instructive in the act of looking at art and that there is something to be learned through the appreciation of art that will prompt a more moral stance toward the nonhuman world. While some might contend that approximating nature to works of human art diminishes its significance, in my view, there is much to be gained by viewing nature through the framework of our experience of art. When we regard something aesthetically, “it is the perceptual qualities (or phenomenal qualities) of the object that we contemplate.” We take an interest in the object for its own sake rather than for its function or amenity. According to Emily Brady, “the aesthetic response is typically contrasted with perception as a means to knowing the object, or an intellectual type of attention to it.” An aesthetic appreciation of natural environments and nonhuman others is different than an experience of them mediated through scientific or factual considerations; it is grounded in the immediate perceptual experience of them and has more to do with emotion and imagination than with intellectual aims. But this, I argue, is an important part of developing an appreciation that ultimately leads to respect and ethical treatment. Brady agrees that aesthetic “contemplation is not passive but rather an active engagement of our perceptual and affective capacities in relation to the object’s qualities. There is a sense in which we are drawn out of ourselves as we become absorbed by the qualities of the aesthetic object ... what is clear is that we open ourselves up to the object and allow ourselves to be thoroughly engaged by it.”<sup>13</sup>

Yuriko Saito, too, has argued that “concern for the aesthetic in our everyday life is neither frivolous nor trivial. It has a close connection to the moral dimension of our lives.”<sup>14</sup> For Saito, aesthetic value that engages “our multisensory and temporary sequential experiences” not only enhances pleasure, “it also communicates a moral attitude affirming the importance of others ...”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the human capacity for appreciation associated with relating to art seems significant. Timothy Morton explains the unique qualities of appreciation as contrasted to tolerance: the difference between the two has to do with coexistence.

*Tolerate* means that within my conceptual reference frame, I allow something to exist, even though my frame doesn’t really allow it. *Appreciate* means that I just admire it, no matter what

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<sup>13</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Yuriko Saito, “The Moral Dimension of Japanese Aesthetics,” *The Journal of aesthetics and art criticism* 65, no. 1 (2007), 94.

<sup>15</sup> Saito, “The Moral Dimension of Japanese Aesthetics,” 92.

my reference frame is. That's why we use the term *appreciate* to talk about art. No one says 'I really tolerated that Beethoven string quartet' in a positive way. But you can easily say 'I really appreciated that disco tune' and people will know that you mean something positive.<sup>16</sup>

There are many reasons to treat other lifeforms and natural environments well, but *appreciation* is a kind of relationality that doesn't require justifiable explanation: you don't know why you should care, but you do. Although Kant doesn't put it in the same terms, he characterizes the beauty experience in a similar way, as I discussed in chapter two. The kind of appreciation we typically associate with relating to art, might, therefore, be a useful kind of regard for nonhuman others and natural environments because, like Kant's beauty experience, knowledge and reasoning are not required. Art appreciation is what Morton calls *thinkfeel*. Because scientific and factual considerations are not always successful in changing attitudes and feelings, the *thinkfeel* associated with appreciation is a helpful addition.

However, the kinds of art and the presentation of such art in educational situations matters. According to Ruitenber, "real art, art that is not just instrumental, entertainment, or decoration, breaks through the limits of reason [and] offers new ways of living with the world."<sup>17</sup> As Brady likewise points out, "an ever-changing tableau [of art forms] means that aesthetic appreciation unfolds too ... new aesthetic qualities [emerge], while others remain constant."<sup>18</sup> For this reason, I trouble Kant's blanket conception of art. Indeed, art and what is considered such has evolved significantly since Kant's day. I argue here that there is an important difference between the kind of art Kant was envisioning — likely framed neoclassical paintings — and art of the centuries that followed, especially twentieth-century minimalist art which is not contained in frames but rather often intended to be experienced as a part of a natural environment.

Before proceeding, I should address two potential misinterpretations of my argument: (1) why a focus on artworks as a model for moral appreciation of nature rather than other kinds of aesthetic experiences, and (2) why I advocate for some artforms over others: twentieth century minimalist art over framed neoclassical paintings. To the first potential misinterpretation, some might wonder what role art in

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<sup>16</sup> Timothy Morton, *All Art is Ecological* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 96.

<sup>17</sup> Ruitenber, "Learning to Live With Art," 247.

<sup>18</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 59.

particular has to play in an aesthetic sensibility toward the natural environment. After all, there are all kinds of aesthetic experiences one might have that don't involve explicit "works of art" at all. One might have an aesthetic experience eating a meal, drinking a fine wine, watching a sunset. Why is art so special when it comes to cultivating an environmental or ecological sensibility? The type of engagement most common to artworks — whether they be paintings, sculptures, other types of installations, or even performance artworks — is a distanced viewing. This kind of engagement most closely resembles how most people engage with nonhuman nature. While it is true that segments of the human population engage in a more hands-on, direct way with nonhuman others and environments, the vast majority of students in Western schools engage nature by visual and other types of passive perception. As for the second potential misinterpretation, I do not mean to argue in this chapter that mid-twentieth century American minimalist art inspired by Japanese aesthetic design is the only kind of art students should be exposed to or engage with. I also don't mean to argue that this kind of art is *better* for art education as environmental education. What I have intended to illustrate in this chapter is that the way we ask students to consider different art forms and what they might convey about human cultural relationships to environments, has the potential to shape the ways in which students think about and relate to the nonhuman.

In the sections that follow, I first outline Kant's demarcation of the appreciation of art from appreciation of nature and the connection he posits between the appreciation of nature and moral aptitude. Then, I turn to theories of aesthetic education to make the point that looking at the nonhuman world and nonhuman others through this kind of framework can indeed prompt a moral relationship between human and nonhuman others: Emily Brady's concepts of an "integrated aesthetic" and "aesthetic communication," as well as Claudia Ruitenberg's idea of an education for art-that-is-other. I then put these theories into conversation with the minimalist art of the mid-twentieth century inspired by Japanese aesthetics as a case in point, illustrating that viewing the natural world as art prompts a moral distance and regard, or as Emily Brady articulates, "aesthetic sensitivity ... supports an attitude of respect for nature."<sup>19</sup> Finally, I illustrate,

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<sup>19</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 4.

with the help of Young Imm Kang Song's call for engagement with ecological art in classrooms, what engagement with art in an educational setting toward an environmental sensibility might look like.

### **Kant on Appreciation of Art Versus Appreciation of Nature**

Kant claims that an appreciation of the beautiful in art is not an indication of moral thinking. An appreciation for beauty in nature alone is associated with moral goodness, says Kant. In this section, I trouble this idea on two counts: (1) Kant contradicts himself in his description of the difference between agreeable and fine art with regard to the judgement of fine art requiring "ways of cognizing" that transcend sensual delight;<sup>20</sup> and (2) Kant's understanding of nature as wholly separate from and other than the work of humans is philosophically dubious.

In Section 42 of *Critique of Judgement*, "On Intellectual Interest in the Beautiful," Kant points out that identifying an affinity between an interest in the beautiful (aesthetic interest) and moral goodness is problematic because of issues like vice and vanity. Kant addresses this issue by conceding "that an interest in the *beautiful in art* (in which I include the artistic use of natural beauties for our adornment, and hence for vanity's sake) provides no proof whatever that someone's way of thinking is attached to the morally good, or even inclined toward it."<sup>21</sup> However, writes Kant,

I do maintain that to take a *direct interest* in the beauty of *nature* (not merely to have the taste needed to judge it) is always a mark of a good soul; and that, if this interest is habitual, if it readily associates itself with the *contemplation of nature*, this [fact] indicates at least a mental attunement favorable to moral feeling.<sup>22</sup>

Kant is diligent in differentiating *sensuous* judgements of taste from judgements of beauty associated with moral feeling. For Kant, sensuousness has to do with mere agreeableness, whereas an interest in the form of beauty is associated with moral thinking. Kant clarifies that by the beauty of nature he means the beautiful *forms* of nature, while he maintains that an interest in *charms* alone "is yet empirical" and therefore not associated with moral feeling. In fact, says Kant, even if art surpasses nature in form, still, only beauty in

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<sup>20</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 172.

<sup>21</sup> Kant, 165.

<sup>22</sup> Kant, 165-166.

nature arouses what Kant calls a direct interest. I discuss Kant's direct interest in chapter two. When it comes to differences in estimations of the beautiful in nature and in art, "even though in the judgement of mere taste neither would vie for superiority over the other ..." the pleasure or displeasure in the judgement of taste, though disinterested, also gives rise to no interest because the judgement is subjective (a matter of preference and agreeableness only). On the other hand, the judgements of moral feelings associated with beauty transcend the empirical and merely agreeable to become intellectual judgements:

We also have an intellectual power of judgement, i.e., an ability for determining a priori with regard to mere forms of practical maxims (insofar as such maxims qualify of themselves giving universal law) a liking that we make a law for everyone; this judgement too is not based on any interest, *yet it gives rise to one*.<sup>23</sup>

Judgements of beauty differ from judgements of agreeableness because agreeableness concerns only the senses, whereas judgements of beauty give rise to an intellectual interest due to their universalizing effect. Kant attributes this universalizing effect, which he interprets as analogous to moral thinking, to the perceived lawful arrangements of nature. When nature displays itself to a human viewer as art (it is judged to be so beautiful as to be a 'work of art'), it appears so harmonious as to seem intentional — like a lawful arrangement.

Consider ... how we admire nature, which in its beautiful products displays itself as art, [i.e., as acting] not merely by chance but, as it were, intentionally, in terms of a lawful arrangement and as a purposiveness without a purpose; and since we do not find this purpose anywhere outside us, we naturally look for it in ourselves, namely, in what constitutes the ultimate purpose of our existence: our moral vocation.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, art only arouses an indirect interest because it is always connected to a purpose: to imitate, to illustrate, to please or delight; its purpose is never in and of itself. Art cannot happen on accident, thinks Kant, it must be an act on the part of a human actor. This is the main difference between nature and art for Kant and the reason why an interest in the beautiful in nature is an interest in beauty as such whereas an interest in the beautiful in art is only sensuously agreeable.

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<sup>23</sup> Kant, 167.

<sup>24</sup> Kant, 168.

Kant understands nature as anything that occurs outside of human activity. However, this understanding of nature quickly becomes philosophically dubious when we start to examine individual objects and phenomena. For example, Kant claims “for we consider someone’s way of thinking to be coarse and ignoble if he has no feeling for beautiful nature ...and sticks to the enjoyments of mere sense that he gets from meals or the bottle.”<sup>25</sup> Kant contrasts a feeling for beautiful nature to sensual experiences of food and drink, but surely food and drink are objects of nature. Perhaps it is the human involvement in processing the items in nature to be suitable for human consumption that Kant thinks disqualifies them as things “of nature.” But one would be hard-pressed to identify an object “in nature” that has been unimpacted by human processes and likewise hard-pressed to find a human who has not been impacted by “nature.” Many philosophers have noted the issues with attempts to demarcate a human and nonhuman “natural” realm. Two perspectives helpful here are that of Arnold Berleant and Timothy Morton.

In his book *Living in the Landscape*, Berleant describes a natural environment as “an integral whole ... an interrelated and interdependent union of people, place, together with their reciprocal processes,”<sup>26</sup> of which “the familiar notion of nature as everything outside the human sphere [that] places the natural realm separate and apart” is no longer an accurate conception.<sup>27</sup> Further, “related to this conception is the familiar idea of nature as that part of the world unchanged by human action, a view codified in the conventional distinction between the natural and the artificial.”<sup>28</sup> However, according to Berleant, it is difficult at best and impossible at worst to locate “regions on the earth that have not been affected in some significant way by human activity.” What is required is a conception of nature which recognizes “that human actions have transformed the planet” such that “the distinction between the natural and the artificial no longer holds.” Put simply, there is no *nature* apart and distinct from human beings because of the ways in which human beings, nonhumans, and environments reciprocally act and are acted upon by one another:

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<sup>25</sup> Kant, 169-170.

<sup>26</sup> Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 14.

<sup>27</sup> Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Berleant, 31.



In light of what we now know about the far-reaching effects of human actions ... it is no longer plausible to think of nature ... as separate from humans. Nor, conversely, can we insulate human life from the reciprocal effects of these changes. We are all bound up in one great natural system, an ecosystem of universal proportions in which no part is immune from the events and changes in the others. The natural world is, then, incorrigibly artificial and ... includes human beings and human works. We can only conclude that nature has become all-embracing, either in Spinoza's sense of a total order or in Heidegger's sense of existential habitation, of dwelling poetically."<sup>29</sup>

In a very similar and more recent iteration of this idea, Timothy Morton, in his book *Ecology Without Nature*, argues that “the very idea of ‘nature’ which so many hold dear will have to wither away” because the very message of environmental justice is that the environment must cease to be “That Thing Over There that surrounds and sustains us.”<sup>30</sup> Instead, we ought to confront the ways in which we act on and are acted upon by ‘nature.’ For these reasons, I find Kant’s conception of nature as everything outside of human will to be unhelpful for an environmental aesthetic.

However, what is helpful about Kant’s discussion of art is it’s being “fine” or high when it *resembles* nature. Kant says that art is *fine* when “it’s purpose is that the pleasure ... accompan[ies] presentations that are *ways of cognizing*.”<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, “agreeable arts are those whose purpose is merely enjoyment.”<sup>32</sup> For Kant, the pleasure derived from the judgement of fine art is distinct from the “enjoyment” of agreeable art. The distinction has to do with the apparent purposiveness in fine art which resembles the purposiveness of nature.

Fine art ... is a way of presenting that is purposive on its own and that furthers, even though without a purpose, the culture of our mental powers to [facilitate] social communication ... that this pleasure must be a pleasure of reflection rather than one of enjoyment arising from mere sensation. Hence aesthetic art that is also fine art is one whose standard is the reflective power of judgement, rather than sensation proper.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Berleant, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 172.

<sup>32</sup> Kant, 172.

<sup>33</sup> Kant, 173.

The pleasure derived from contemplating fine art (and nature) is more than merely agreeable and enjoyable, it is also reflective; the mind is active, and the imagination is at play. In other words, agreeable art pacifies; fine art disrupts. This distinction between agreeable or enjoyment and pleasure is potentially helpful to an environmental aesthetics because an aesthetics of environment is not about pleasure as mere enjoyment; our reflective power of judgement must be stirred by the experience in order to provoke environmental awareness.

Kant defines *fine* art by its resemblance to nature. Although “when dealing with a product of fine art we must become conscious that it is art rather than nature . . . , the purposiveness in its form must seem as free from all constraint of chosen rules as if it were a product of mere nature.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, the art object must resemble nature in its forms so closely that all traces of human technique disappear. Interestingly, Kant thinks the comparison goes both ways: “Nature, we say, is beautiful if it also looks like art; and art can be called fine art only if we are conscious that it is art while yet it looks to us like nature.”<sup>35</sup> But, the propensity of moral thinking does *not* go both ways: the judging we do when we look at art — even fine art — is never direct because as much as art might resemble nature, it is not nature; it is instrumental, a product of human hands, and this, for Kant, disqualifies it from the kind of appreciation that begets moral thinking.

For we may say universally, whether it concerns beauty in nature or in art: *beauty is what we like in merely judging it* (rather than either in sensation proper or through concept). Now art always has a determinate intention to produce something. But if this something were mere sensation (something merely subjective), to be accompanied by pleasure, then we would [indeed] like this product in judging it, [but] only by means of the feeling of sense. If the intention were directed at producing at determinate object and were achieved by the art, then we would like the object only through concepts.<sup>36</sup>

For Kant, an experience of formal beauty — the kind that begets moral thinking — can only happen if the experience is free of both sensations and concepts. If you experience a sensation or make an association that points to anything societal you are, as Morton puts it in his interpretation, “in danger of being *charmed or*

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<sup>34</sup> Kant, 173.

<sup>35</sup> Kant, 174.

<sup>36</sup> Kant, 174.

*enchanted*, rather than experiencing beauty, and that, in [Kant's] book, is not OK." While Kant does acknowledge that experiencing beauty in art does do *something* to us — has some kind of impact — Morton calls it a mind meld, Kant makes sure to make clear that "it really does have to do with how you're a human being imposing reality on things. So really, for Kant, the experience is coming from you, not the artwork."<sup>37</sup> Because art comes from human hands and nature is "natural," the experience of beauty in nature is pure (free of those pesky sensations and concepts), and the experience of beauty in art is always a cheaper kind of experience. However, the difference between humanmade things (art) and nonhuman made things (honeycombs, to use Kant's example) isn't so clear. Morton describes this problem in terms of design. Kant's problem with art is that it has a human designer. But Morton says of design,

Humans can do it. But nonhumans also do it, all the time. Think about evolution. It's design without a designer ... There is no such thing as unformatted matter, waiting for someone to stamp a form on it. That's an ecologically dangerous fantasy of so-called Western civilization ... My face has been designed by acne. A glass has been designed by glass blowers and cutters. A black hole has been designed by gravitational forces in a gigantic star. And in particular, things are definitely not unformatted surfaces that can only be formatted by human shaping or human projection.<sup>38</sup>

This take on nonhuman design echoes of Berleant's earlier claim that humans and nonhuman beings have reciprocal impact on one another such that sharp distinctions between the two are implausible. Therefore, Kant's notion that there is something distinctly different about an experience of beauty in nature and an experience of beauty in art — where human moral thinking is concerned — is problematic.

However, I concede that the important difference between human works of art and natural occurrences — namely, that one has a 'designer' and the other does not —<sup>39</sup> does pose a challenge for an environmental education which argues for art appreciation as a framework for environmental justice. As Brady notes,

Water-falls and clouds are not planned or executed, and there is a greater degree of spontaneity involved in the generation of natural environments. Hornet's nests and ecosystems involve natural teleology of a sort, but this is different from the intentionality of

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<sup>37</sup> Morton, *All Art is Ecological*, 68.

<sup>38</sup> Morton, 79.

<sup>39</sup> Unless, of course, you believe in divine creationism, which I do not, so I won't address that here.

artworks. Appreciation is not directed by an artist, but by perceptual attention to qualities presented by the object to us.<sup>40</sup>

However, Kant's discussion of nature's teleology in the third critique and the way this teleology is experienced by the human perceiver — as having an “apparent purposiveness” — seems difficult to discern from the experience of admiring a human work of art. To use Morton's phrasing, nature's teleology is design without a designer. While it is true that one reason artwork demands our esteemed regard and appreciation is because it was dreamed up by a human mind and executed by human hands, it's also true that we hold natural phenomena in high regard for the exact opposite reason: it is more magnificent that anything that could *ever* be crafted by human hands. Therefore, the argument that viewing nature through the framework of art appreciation diminishes its significance doesn't seem to hold. Moreover, as I argue in the following sections, this framework encourages a moral attitude toward and respect for the nonhuman because the same mental convictions that inspire the appreciation of beauty inspire respect and generosity. Philosophers going back to Plato have associated experiences of beauty with creativity, generosity, love, and moral conviction. Furthermore, appreciation of art might help directly with environmental consciousness and justice.

### **“Integrated Aesthetics” and “Aesthetic Communication”**

In her book *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, Emily Brady discusses that although philosophers of aesthetics are primarily interested in the arts and philosophers of the environment are primarily interested in our ethical attitudes toward the natural world, in the last few decades,

... new work in environmental aesthetics seeks to highlight the interesting issues pointed up when we ask central questions about our experiences of natural environments in contrast to artworks, and it also asserts the importance of aesthetic value to discussions of our relationship to the natural world.<sup>41</sup>

According to Brady, aesthetics of environment is about interrogating the similarities and differences of our aesthetic experiences of art and natural beauty, suggesting that the two kinds of experiences can and do inform one another. Brady proposes a theory of integrated aesthetics, which aims at an “aesthetic application

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<sup>40</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 61.

<sup>41</sup> Brady, 1.

of natural environments” that balances subjective and objective aesthetic appreciation.<sup>42</sup> Brady draws on Kantian ideas of aesthetic appreciation, namely: his nature-first (rather than art-first) emphasis of appreciation, the non-cognitive nature of aesthetic appreciation, and disinterestedness. Brady does, however, diverge from Kant in some areas: for one, she argues for the need to broaden the range of what counts as aesthetic objects. As I discuss above, Kant’s view of aesthetic objects and even art objects is much more limited than the contemporary view. The second way that Brady’s account departs from Kant is that Brady is not concerned that emotions like charm and delight undermine aesthetic judgements. As discussed above, Morton makes this critique of Kant as well: that being charmed or delighted need not undermine a disinterested judgment. Similarly, Brady asserts, “the concept of aesthetic communication is the starting point for an outline of environmental aesthetic education.” She stresses the importance of developing a particular aesthetic sensitivity in order to better discern aesthetic value in the environment.<sup>43</sup> Brady’s concept of aesthetic communication, I argue, is a useful framework through which to employ art education as a tool toward cultivating sensitivity to and appreciation for the non-human. According to Brady, aesthetic sensitivity supports “an attitude of respect for nature.” Following from Kant, Brady views aesthetic value as non-instrumental. Brady’s interpretation of Kant’s aesthetic judgment is important to her frameworks of both an integrated aesthetic and an aesthetic communication. Brady does not view Kant’s aesthetic judgement as passive — though it is disinterested and “grounded in an immediate perceptual response rather than one that is mediated through knowledge or factual considerations” — but rather

an active engagement with our perceptual and affective capacities in relation to the object’s qualities ... There is a sense in which we are drawn out of ourselves as we become absorbed by the qualities of the aesthetic object ... we open ourselves up to the object and allow ourselves to be thoroughly engaged by it.<sup>44</sup>

This kind of engagement with the object of perception opens us up to what Brady calls a “sympathetic attention,” which “is how we prepare ourselves for attending to an object.”<sup>45</sup> Why a *sympathetic* attention?

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<sup>42</sup> Brady, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Brady, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Brady, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Brady, 9.

Because sympathy allows us to attend to a being — human or non — in the *appropriate* way. Consider “having sympathy for other people, which involves attention to their feelings, trying to grasp them, and putting one’s own feelings aside if there is conflict.”<sup>46</sup> An open-minded perceptual immersion in a natural environment or with a nonhuman other allows for such an attention to guide our treatment of the environment or being.

*Integrated Aesthetic*

Brady’s integrated aesthetic offers a model of aesthetic engagement

that incorporates the various dimensions of aesthetic appreciation of nature. It emphasises the relationship between subject and object by recognising the way human capacities such as perception, imagination, emotion and thought, respond to features of the aesthetic object or environment. [Her] model is intended to be inclusive of a range of individual experience without the problems associated with a strongly subjectivist stance. Disinterestedness functions to characterise [her] approach accordingly.<sup>47</sup>

Brady’s integrated aesthetic is helpful for conceptualizing art education as environmental education because the sensitivities to perception and awareness required on the part of the observers of the art object translate to sensitivity of perception and awareness of nonhuman environments and beings. The goal of an art education for environmental education is to inspire appreciation of the nonhuman toward a moral orientation. As Brady puts it, in an aesthetic experience, “appreciation comes through the subject’s appreciative capacities — perception, imagination and so on, coupled with open, sympathetic attention to qualities of the aesthetic object.”<sup>48</sup> The term “integrated aesthetic” refers to the *integration* required for an awareness of the relationship that exists between the observers and an environment or being. While, as Brady makes clear, Kantian disinterestedness is a significant part of aesthetic appreciation, this notion should not be confused with indifference or phenomenological distance. Rather, in an integrated aesthetic experience, the perceiver is aware of the interconnectedness of self and other, while maintaining a respectful distance and noninstrumental view of the being or space perceived.

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<sup>46</sup> Brady, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Brady, 185.

<sup>48</sup> Brady, 120.

While Brady's "integrated aesthetic stresses the idea of situatedness," she does not count this kind of engagement among the holistic "one with nature" ideologies of some others. Rather, as Brady claims,

aesthetic experience is characterised by a relationship between appreciator and environment, rather than becoming one with nature. The appreciator is placed in a certain way — aesthetically — in relation to an environment. This is not merely a spatial relation ... It is meant to capture all the possible types of aesthetic relations that can arise through participating with, or even interacting with, what one is situated in — the environment. In these relations, some distance is maintained, rather than our being fully integrated with the environment. *Recognition of nature's otherness is implicit in appreciation.*<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, Brady also differentiates the relationality she calls for in her integrated aesthetic from the "picturesque" form of engagement. The picturesque aesthetic of nature holds that

there is no problem at all in moving from art to nature appreciation precisely *because* nature ought to be appreciated as if it were an artwork. This ... 'landscape' or 'scenery' model of aesthetic appreciation ... defines the structure of appreciation according to the perspective we bring to landscape paintings, where we stand back and behold the design, forms and colours of the picture. Moving from the art gallery to the natural landscape, we stand in one place and enjoy what we see as a scene, a canvas laid before us, bounded not by a wooden frame but by the horizon, and the limits of the visual field.<sup>50</sup>

Brady calls this mode of appreciation outdated because it privileges art, "as if the only way we could appreciate and value nature is through the lens of art." For Brady, unlike a landscape painting, viewing nature as an immersive environment "offers the opportunity of much more dynamic appreciation due to its changeability and the possibility of immersion in it — actually rather than merely imaginatively." While I am in agreement with Brady's latter point that understanding nature as an immersive environment that goes well beyond our perceptual field is an important part of an appropriate appreciation, I am skeptical of her former point that comparing nature to art — the picturesque — is such a problem.

For one thing, students in the United States, especially those living in urban environments, are much more likely to be exposed to artistic images and writings in school than they are to be exposed to natural spaces. If exposure to nature *necessarily* precedes exposure to art when it comes to an aesthetic sensibility, where does that leave these students? I argue instead that exposure to and engagement with art can cultivate

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<sup>49</sup> Brady, 121, italics mine.

<sup>50</sup> Brady, 68.

an eco-and environmental aesthetic. The reason for this is the activation of imagination that occurs when students engage with art. Through imagination we explore otherness. This type of imaginative activity also facilitates an empathetic identification with others. I argue that that other could easily be nonhuman.

Brady employs Kantian disinterestedness as a component of the kind of appreciation she has in mind. She argues “for a renewed understanding of disinterestedness, where its negative connotations are stripped away to reveal it as a concept that supports engagement and sympathetic attention, without the problems associated with overly detached responses.” Disinterestedness

supports appreciation that is sensitive to the particularities of the experience and works positively to shift focus away from the self and towards aesthetic qualities for their own sake, rather than as a means to fulfilling some personal or practical goal. In this way, disinterestedness supports a less human-centred approach to aesthetic appreciation of nature.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, Kantian disinterestedness is an important component of an integrated aesthetic because it supports the kind of respect and care that an environmental ethic is characterized by; lest we forget that disinterestedness originated in moral philosophy, as I discussed in chapter two. Respect is a moral concept that depends upon treating another as an end and not a means: “Aesthetic and moral values are distinct, but each type of valuing may complement the other for developing an appropriate attitude towards the natural environment.”<sup>52</sup>

### *Aesthetic Communication*

According to Brady, “aesthetic justification and communication encourages an environmental aesthetic education that enables the education of capacities for the discovery of aesthetic value in the environment.”<sup>53</sup> Through her explanation of aesthetic communication, Brady gives some of Kant’s ideas contemporary significance in the context of aesthetic appreciation of nature. Furthermore, Brady attempts to get around the problem of subjectivity when it comes to aesthetic appreciation of nature. Brady’s theory leaves room for both subjectivity *and* objectivity when it comes to communicating one’s aesthetic

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<sup>51</sup> Brady 141-142.

<sup>52</sup> Brady 142.

<sup>53</sup> Brady 191.



observations. She does this by engaging with Kant's idea of the *sensus communis*, or 'common sense.' Brady calls this idea the basis of aesthetic community and reveals "how deeply public our aesthetic judgements are."<sup>54</sup> Brady points out that, for Kant,

the capacity to discern aesthetic qualities is common ... among 'normal' perceivers. The communicability of aesthetic judgements — that they must be communicable to be possible in the first place — says something significant about aesthetic judgements. Kant emphasises that taste is first and foremost a public sense. He shows this through an interesting contrast that he sets up between the *sensus communis*, understood more generally, and the ordinary meaning of having common sense in an intellectual sense:

We must here take the *sensus communis* to mean the idea of a sense shared [by all of us], i.e., a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else's way of presenting [something], in order *as it were* to compare our own judgment with human reason in general and thus escape the illusion that arises from the ease of mistaking subjective and private conditions for objective ones, an illusion that would have a prejudicial influence on the judgment .<sup>55</sup>

This idea indicates that our shared experience of aesthetic judgements depends both on intrapersonal subjective judgements *and* interpersonal communication about these judgements: the ability to understand the perspective of another. We must be able to assume a standpoint *beyond* the self. The fact that aesthetic judgments are both public and communicable is central to an idea of aesthetic education for environmental awareness, thinks Brady. Such an education is achieved through the cultivation of an aesthetic sensitivity to nonhuman nature and others and the nurturing of perception and imagination that that entails.

For Brady, when it comes to an environmental aesthetics, the "bad judge" will not be those lacking in expert scientific or ecological knowledge of nonhuman beings and environments, but those who fail to attend properly to the said being or environment.

### **Art that is Other**

In order to situate Brady's approaches to an environmental aesthetic into philosophy of education, I put her ideas in conversation with Claudia Ruitenberg's approach to a philosophy of art education which prepares students for encounters when meaning is either not easily discerned or impossible to discern: encounters with "art that is other."

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<sup>54</sup> Brady 212.

<sup>55</sup> Brady, 212.

Ruitenberg is interested specifically in “works of art so unfamiliar and radically ‘other,’ that the only adequate preparation may be to confess that we cannot be prepared for what is coming.” Ruitenberg defines “art that is other” as “those works of art that address us from, as it were, another shore, from across the boundaries that we have created to separate self from other.” For Ruitenberg, an education for learning to live with art is at the same time an education in learning to live with “the uncertainty and barriers to transparent meaning presented by otherness.”<sup>56</sup> We have a responsibility to live with and face otherness, says Ruitenberg, and art education can help with this learning. She points out that Western philosophy tends to privilege the present self rather than the absent other. Although Ruitenberg doesn’t employ the term anthropocentrism here, the otherness Ruitenberg discusses could well apply to the other-than and more-than human that we often push to the edge of consciousness in our daily practices.

Ruitenberg notes that when we encounter a work of art that is strange, unsettling, or seemingly meaningless, we’re tempted to reject the work as nonsensical or dismiss it as art altogether. But this kind of experience — devoid of association or clear instrumentalism — is how Kant describes an experience of beauty. Beauty, for Kant, is disinterested; it has no meaning or purpose but is an enclosed experience in and of itself. This is the part of Kant’s aesthetics that Brady aims to resuscitate: that aesthetic experience can be non-cognitive; beauty need not have meaning or use to be valued and appreciated. Applied to an orientation toward the nonhuman, what if we did not look at landscapes, plants, and animals as things that had clear meaning and purpose but instead as things of beauty that needed only our value and appreciation?

Ruitenberg claims that “art-that-is-other often poses” what she calls, following George Steiner, “ontological difficulty, because it can only be understood in terms of itself, that is, in terms of a framework that is by definition unknown to us.”<sup>57</sup> Much of nature’s scales, temporality, and processes are frameworks that are misunderstood by or unknown to the human viewer, so perception of nature can often lead to an ontological difficulty and result in not only lack of appreciation but even disgust. Ruitenberg goes on to say:

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<sup>56</sup> Ruitenberg, “Learning to Live With Art,” 452.

<sup>57</sup> Ruitenberg, 254.

“I cannot enter the work of art, become part of it, and I cannot make the work of art become part of me. Looking at a work of art means being constantly reminded of its otherness ...”<sup>58</sup> This is true of a difficult, ontologically disruptive piece of art, and it is also true of nonhuman nature. We do not fit neatly into the spaces of the world not made by humans and for humans. Just as nonhumans do not fit neatly into the spaces that we have created for ourselves. Yet we must face one another, confront the otherness, and figure out a way to live side-by-side in a peaceable and mutually beneficial way. Just as a student may be taught that a perplexing piece of art is all the more interesting and precious *because* of its otherness, might that same student be taught to appreciate the strangeness and unfamiliarity of nonhuman nature and that it is worthy of value and appreciation not only in spite of its otherness but also because of it?

Living just with the sameness of ourselves is not living. Living is inevitably living with otherness— and that is what learning to live with art means. We may not understand art, but we ought to befriend it nevertheless. Learning to be a friend of art is learning not to appropriate it—on the contrary, it is learning to keep one’s distance.<sup>59</sup>

The same can be said of natural landscapes and nonhuman others. We can learn to befriend these entities, but also understand that befriending can mean keeping one’s distance. We don’t *use* art for things in aesthetic contexts. In fact, when one does use art to get something, we call this ‘selling out.’ Says Ruitenberg, “in keeping my distance from art, I can see and respect it. I do not turn my back, but live with the work of art in its otherness.”<sup>60</sup> Might we come to regard nonhuman nature in a similar way?

Brady makes the good point that one way in which a natural environment is distinct from a human work of art — at least traditional Western mediums of art — is that, while the work of art is an enclosed object unto itself, “the natural environment potentially environs us.” While we can easily stand apart from a work of art and keep the otherness at a distance, “nature is all around us.”<sup>61</sup> However, at the same time that nature environs us, there is a way in which we lack full access to it. Science is one way in which we try to gain

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<sup>58</sup> Ruitenberg, 257.

<sup>59</sup> Ruitenberg, 257.

<sup>60</sup> Ruitenberg, 257.

<sup>61</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 15.

access: we study things, name them, and categorize them. But, as discussed earlier in this chapter, while scientific knowledge is helpful for other kinds of attitudes, aesthetic appreciation is different and calls for a different sort of regard and inner experience. Aesthetic judgement isn't concerned with meaning or knowledge; in fact, a significant aspect of aesthetic appreciation is, as Ruitenberg points out, surrendering to the fact that intellectual knowledge and meaning may not be possible. Brady, in her aesthetics of environment, rightly points to Kant's characterization of aesthetic judgements as non-cognitive: "His views can be interpreted as arguing that aesthetic judgements do not rest in a concept of the object, so that knowledge of the object is not necessary, nor the basis or aim of the aesthetic response."<sup>62</sup>

As I discussed earlier in the chapter, different mediums of artwork are more conducive to environmental appreciation and consciousness. As mentioned in the third chapter of this dissertation and earlier in this one, the kind of art Kant likely had in mind when he discounted appreciation of art as conducive to moral thinking is art in the traditional Western sense: framed paintings meant to be representational rather than experiential. Not until the mid-seventeenth century with the rise of impressionist painting did western art evolve from representational to experiential. However, non-Western artistic mediums have a different history. Japanese aesthetics, which would go on to influence the American minimalist art movement at mid twentieth century, features an aesthetic sensitivity to environment which is helpful for explicating both Brady's and Ruitenberg's theories of aesthetic appreciation. I discuss Japanese and Minimalist art as cases in point toward an ecoaesthetic in the next section.

### **Japanese and Minimalist Art**

Brady points out that *context* is one important way that appreciation of art differs from that of nature. We experience nature, says Brady, as environment. Because "art objects [in the traditional sense] are physically bounded, our various aesthetic perspectives and engagement with them are determined by their boundaries."<sup>63</sup> I discussed in the previous chapter the idea of frames, both material and contextual, which

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<sup>62</sup> Brady, 11.

<sup>63</sup> Brady, 64.

organize our experience of art objects but may also order our experiences of nature when nature is framed, as in at zoos or other nature-based venues. Brady's explanation of the appreciation of artworks being determined by their physical and contextual boundaries takes a cue from Kant's distinction between aesthetic experiences of art and aesthetic experiences of nature: Kant also thinks that experiences of art are always rooted in their purpose, whether that purpose is to delight or to illustrate some object in the world. Only works of art that employ genius — a guiding purpose of nature that is unknowable to the human artist — can approximate the kind of beauty associated with moral thinking: a true judgement of beauty associated with moral goodness.<sup>64</sup>

I'm going to argue in this section, however, that there are mediums of visual art, the experiences of which more closely resemble an experience of nature as environment. I'm also going to suggest some types of engagement with art that educators can employ to aid in inspiring an environmental sensibility in students. One artform that gestures toward rather than attempts to frame the nonhuman environment is the minimalist art movement of the mid-twentieth century in the United States. Minimalist art is a form of abstract art, composed primarily of geometric shapes. Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Agnes Martin, and Robert Morris are some names typically associated with the movement. This art form extended "the abstract idea that art should have its own reality and not be an imitation of some other thing."<sup>65</sup> Where traditional Western mediums of art typically aim to represent an aspect of the real world (a person, a lily pad, a bowl of fruit), with minimalist art, there is no attempt to associate the art object with anything other than itself. Aesthetically, the qualities of minimalist art are order, simplicity, and harmony. Significantly, these are the very qualities of nature's apparent subjective purposiveness that Kant says inspire moral thinking: the sense of lawfulness and reciprocity the cycles and processes of nature seem to exhibit.

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<sup>64</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 174-175.

<sup>65</sup> Tate Museum of Art, "Art Term: Minimalism," accessed May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, [tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/minimalism](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/minimalism).

According to art critic Kyle Chayka, the minimalist art movement “presented a new, unexpected way of seeing and being in the world ... [and] the appreciation of things for and in themselves ... the removal of barriers between the self and the world.”<sup>66</sup>

According to minimalist principles, we have to fight the need to anthropomorphize or impose a metaphorical meaning on the installation. The [artworks] do not symbolize anything ... nor do they represent the variations of our bodies, astrological arrangements, or ideal geometric proportions. Rather, [they] are just there, empty of content except for the sheer fact of their physical presence, obdurate and silent, explaining nothing and with nothing to explain.<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, Donald Judd, an integral figure in the minimalist art movement of the 1960s United States, wrote in his essay “Specific Objects,”

The main thing wrong with painting is that it is a rectangular plane placed flat against the wall ... it determines and limits the arrangement of whatever is on or inside of it ... anything spaced in a rectangle and on a plane suggests something in and on something else, something in its surround, which suggests an object or figure in its space ... – that’s the main purpose of painting.<sup>68</sup>

In the previous chapter, I compared the implications of placing nature in literal frames — as in zoos, aquariums, and other nature-based venues — and Erving Goffman’s notion of contextual frames: those like the phenomena of theatre and play, which order our experiences. Minimalist art is importantly different from painting as a medium because the minimalist three-dimensional sculpture becomes a part of the landscape rather than existing in frames. We ought not try to order our experience of the natural world by placing it in frames, but rather simply become a part of the landscape ourselves, as in Berleant’s idea of becoming a part of a landscape, rather than seeing nature as existing on another shore or apart from oneself.<sup>69</sup>

Judd wrote that within the genre of art referred to as minimalist art,<sup>70</sup> there are two types and the most obvious difference between them is that one type is “an object, a single thing” and the other type

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<sup>66</sup> Kyle Chayka, *The Longing for Less: Living with Minimalism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 12, 46.

<sup>67</sup> Chayka, *The Longing for Less*, 100.

<sup>68</sup> Donald Judd, *Donald Judd Writings*, eds. Flavin Judd & Caitlin Murray (New York & Marfa, TX: Judd Foundation, 2016), 136, 138.

<sup>69</sup> The phrasing “from another shore” is Ruitenberg’s.

<sup>70</sup> It’s worth noting that Judd denounced the term minimalist artist for himself, though his work is considered seminal to this movement.

consists of structures that are “open and extended, more or less environmental.”<sup>71</sup> The significance of this kind of artwork for an environmental education is that when we call something environmental, we don’t actually mean “over there,” nonhuman nature; we mean ecosystems and environments of which we are a part. Works of art that nod to or attempt to be a part of an environment are better suited to promote environmental thinking because they prompt in the viewer a sense of ambiguity in the boundaries between self and surroundings or self and other. Indeed, Brady’s model of an integrated aesthetic promotes an awareness of the relationship that exists between observer and environment. Minimalist art that is, as Judd puts it, “open and extended” is more conducive to promoting a kind of appreciation that makes clear the relationship between the self and all that surrounds it and all of which it is a part.

Indeed, Chayka writes of minimalist art, “...Its about challenging your deepest beliefs in an attempt to engage with things as they are, to not shy away from reality or its lack of answers.”<sup>72</sup> Similarly, both Brady’s and Ruitenberg’s models of aesthetic experience allow for living with ambiguity in an experience with an environment or an other without the need to make sense of or impose meaning. Brady, in her integrated aesthetics model, takes from Kant a non-cognitive appreciation of nature that reflects the lack of conceptual meaning in minimalist art, the intangibility and ephemerality of which reflects the natural environment in human understanding. Relatedly, Ruitenberg’s argument for living with art that is other is about learning to live with meaning that is difficult or impossible to attain even as we are confronted with an other.

### *Japanese Aesthetics*

Both Brady and Chayka give credit to Japanese aesthetics as inspiration for their thinking on art and environment. In Brady’s case, she calls on change and transience — central features of the Japanese aesthetic appreciation of nature — to inform her integrated aesthetics of nature.<sup>73</sup> For Brady, the transience of nature is a part of what is to be appreciated about nature; nonhuman nature has a temporality and spatiality all its own that cannot be fully understood by humans, but the lack of meaning ought to be accepted and

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<sup>71</sup> Judd, *Donald Judd Writings*, 139.

<sup>72</sup> Chayka, *The Longing for Less*, 219.

<sup>73</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 66.

appreciated rather than cast down or contorted into human processes. A particular aspect of Japanese aesthetics Brady calls attention to is the concept of *mono no aware*. Developed by the eighteenth-century Japanese scholar, Motoori Norinaga, *Mono no aware* is a Buddhist value often translated to “the pathos of things” or “sensitivity to things.”<sup>74</sup> It is an aesthetic of the obscure, ephemeral, and transient qualities of nature, which describes our emotional identification with natural objects or environments. *Mono no aware* “enables an emotive affinity to develop between aesthetic object and appreciator, where it seems to be the object that determines the type of identification that takes place.”<sup>75</sup> Chayka elaborates as well on the concept of *mono no aware* in his account of minimalist art as environment. He describes *mono no aware* as “the beauty of transience, the way a falling leaf or sunlight gilding the edge of a rock at the end of the day can incite a sudden gut-punch awareness that life is evanescent.”<sup>76</sup> This type of appreciation of nature contrasts the Western emphasis on permanence of structures and the domination of human civilization over nonhuman environments. Chayka quotes the philosopher Keiji Nishitani when he explains that

there are two forms of art ... The Western form strives toward permanence, as in the stone cathedral built to last thousands of years or the royal portrait commissioned to communicate ostentatious wealth and power to future generations. Yet in trying to deny its inherent temporariness, this form ends up becoming artificial or inauthentic. The cathedral crumbles into ruins and the portrait tatters; in the end, Nishitani claimed, these monuments can only prove the impossibility of achieving permanence.<sup>77</sup>

Indeed, the Japanese influence on Western artistic sensibilities and relations to environment are well-documented. Yuriko Saito, in her article “The Moral Dimensions of Japanese Aesthetics,” explains that “Japanese aesthetics was first introduced to the non-Japanese audience around the turn of the twentieth century ... Since then, Japanese aesthetic concepts, such as *wabi sabi*, *yu gen*, *iki*, and *mono no aware*, have become better known, some even popularized today.”<sup>78</sup> Moreover, Saito characterizes “the long-held Japanese

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<sup>74</sup> Chayka, *The Longing for Less*; Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 179.

<sup>75</sup> Brady, 179.

<sup>76</sup> Chayka 185.

<sup>77</sup> Chayka quoting Nishitani, 216-217.

<sup>78</sup> Saito, “The Moral Dimension of Japanese Aesthetics,” 85.



aesthetic tradition to be morally based by promoting respect, care, and consideration for others, both humans and nonhumans.”<sup>79</sup> According to Saito, Japanese art and design practitioners are deeply influenced by Zen Buddhism: specifically, Buddhism’s “admonishment of egocentric and anthropocentric viewpoints.”<sup>80</sup> This kind of aesthetic appreciation diverges from Kant’s view that we cannot access the noumenal world — things in themselves — rather, Zen Buddhism “is optimistic about our ability to experience directly the thus-ness or being-suchness of the other (*immo*).”<sup>81</sup>

Saito describes the Japanese aesthetic appreciation of nature as object-centered rather than subject governed. For example, Saito cites the well-known saying by Matsuo Basho: “Of the pine-tree learn from the pine-tree. Of the bamboo learn from the bamboo.” To do this, Basho “calls for ‘the slenderness of mind,’ as one has to overcome one’s personal feelings and concerns in order to grasp and appreciate the qualities of the objects for what they are.”<sup>82</sup> This slenderness of mind is similar in character to the Kantian disinterestedness Brady calls upon in her own aesthetics of environment: to experience a nonhuman other or phenomenon as itself, devoid of thoughts of use, utility, or amenity.

Another illustration of aesthetics as morality toward the nonhuman Saiko draws upon is the work of environmental artist, Alfio Bonamo, who

describes a particular challenge and lively tension when “working . . . directly with natural materials,” primarily felled trees, “not knowing exactly where the process will lead you, feeling and listening to what they have to say” and trying to maintain “the essence of its (each component’s) identity.” Whether in regards to traditional Japanese arts, crafts, or contemporary art projects, this principle of artistic production has an important moral dimension. If prerequisites for our moral life include understanding, appreciating, and respecting the other’s reality, the capacity to experience and appreciate things on their own terms can contribute to applying this principle. As Yi-Fu Tuan puts it, “one kind of definition of a good person, or a moral person, is that that person does not impose his or her fantasy on another”; instead, such a person is “willing to acknowledge the reality of other individuals, or *even of the tree or the rock*” and “to stand and listen.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Saito, 85.

<sup>80</sup> Saito, 88

<sup>81</sup> Saito, 88.

<sup>82</sup> Saito, quoting Basho, 86.

<sup>83</sup> Saito, 88.

In sum, the Japanese approach to aesthetics appreciates the inherent characteristics of things in themselves: “This respectful attitude toward the other, in this case the nonhuman, is valuable not simply for sharpening aesthetic sensibility but also for developing a moral perspective, particularly needed today as we struggle to formulate a morally sound relationship with nature.”<sup>84</sup>

In this chapter, I have turned to theories of aesthetic experience and particular artforms to illustrate the ways in which engaging with art can inspire an ecoaesthetic sensitivity that is rooted in a moral relationship to the nonhuman. I started by proposing an amendment to Kant’s thinking that aesthetic appreciation of art is not conducive to moral thinking in the way that engagement with formal beauty (that only found in nature) is. I turned to Brady’s aesthetics of the natural environment because she proposes a useful repurposing of Kant’s aesthetics toward a moral relationship to the nonhuman world. Upon closer examination, if Kant’s aesthetics are expanded to include the tableau of kinds of art that developed and evolved from the eighteenth century to this one, Kant’s ideas about high and low art can be helpful if reexamined and repurposed. Rather than elitism, Kant’s thinking on art and its relationship to moral thinking has more to do with privileging an attitude of deep reflective appreciation rather than one that is, as Brady puts it, “sentimental and shallow.” It was the representational quality of art at the time of Kant’s writing that likely prompted him to discount it as a capable object of a truly reflective aesthetic experience. However, as I’ve discussed in this chapter, art became more than representational over the centuries and in fact evolved to be environmental. Morton argues that the postmodern turn in art was “in fact the beginning of ecological art, which is to say, art that includes its environment(s) in its very form.” “Postmodernism may not have known it consciously at the time,” writes Morton, “but the ambient openness and strange distortedness of many of its forms talk about the Earth out of which they are ultimately made.”<sup>85</sup>

As I stated in this chapter’s introduction, I don’t mean to argue that twentieth century minimalist art in America or Japanese aesthetic design are the *only* kinds of art that inspire environmental consciousness. But

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<sup>84</sup> Saito, 89

<sup>85</sup> Morton, *All Art if Ecological*, 18.

I do think these particular artforms spark the potential for what Brady calls imagining well: “Imagining well means spotting aesthetic potential, having a sense of what to look for, and knowing when to clip the wings of imagination.”<sup>86</sup>

The power of art to inspire moral thinking has long been discussed by philosophers of education. From Dewey to Eisner to Greene, philosophers of education have long agreed on the power of art appreciation in education to promote morality and compassion. I argue that art has a place in environmental and ecological education in addition to the sciences.

### **Art-based Environmental Education in Action**

In this final section, I offer some suggestions for how students might engage with minimalist environmental art (or what is also sometimes referred to as ecological art) toward an environmental sensibility. In other words, I would like to purpose a specific role that engagement with art can play in an environmental education. Though actually being in and among natural spaces is the most ideal mode of engagement with nature for educational purposes, not all educational institutions are located such that there is ready access to un-tamed or un-treated natural spaces. Interaction with art offers a mode of engagement with nature that may be more readily available to students and educators. As Eileen Adams points out, experiences with art “encourage contemplative, reflective thought, which can extend environmental awareness, an essential basis for environmental understanding.”<sup>87</sup> Elliot Eisner as well writes in *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* that everyday objects in nature are made meaningful and significant from an aesthetic perspective.<sup>88</sup> Further, Young Imm Kang Song argues for ecological art (influenced by both Japanese art and design as well as minimalist art) as a particular medium for educational engagement toward an environmental sensibility. Song suggests that ecological art offers aesthetic and learning experiences. Writes Song,

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<sup>86</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 160.

<sup>87</sup> Eileen Adams, “Back to Basics: Aesthetic Experience,” *Children’s Environments Quarterly* 8 (1991): 21.

<sup>88</sup> Elliot Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

These artworks ...initiate discussions and foster connections to classrooms while providing elementary and middle school students with the opportunities to view and ponder existing artworks, create their own natural artworks, and heighten their ecological awareness.<sup>89</sup>

I interpret Song's suggested approach as Brady's integrated aesthetics in action: ecological art "seeks to engage humans in a sensory experience" and when students engage with this artform, they experience natural materials aesthetically and an appreciation for the objects as themselves is inspired by the experience.

However, I depart somewhat from Song's suggested approach: while Song calls for students to "create their own ecological art in the backyard or schoolyard" and "become artists themselves," if students view natural objects as merely art supplies, nature becomes instrumental toward some end. However, I do appreciate and support Song's suggestion that engagement with environmental or ecological art — or art that in some way gestures towards environment — as educational situations does inspire a discovery of nature "without preconceptions."<sup>90</sup> In other words, understanding elements of nature *as art* inspires students to appreciate the nonhuman in a noninstrumental way that problematizes mainstream understandings of nonhuman environments and beings as instrumental and "become emotionally attached to natural spaces."<sup>91</sup>

Similarly, Rita Turner and Ryan Donnelly offer a pedagogical methodology they call "critical ecoliteracy" that I think could be applied to engagement with visual art.<sup>92</sup> Their proposed curriculum is interdisciplinary and multi-modal, "including poetry, visual art, literary texts, scholarly texts, journalistic reports, film, music, ancient mythology and more ... interspersed within preexisting course frameworks" and can be "modified to suit the needs and conditions of a range of ... humanities classrooms."<sup>93</sup> Though Turner and Donnelly's curriculum centers primarily on "literary and cultural formulations" of nature, there is space to apply these modes of interaction, analysis, and reflection to engagement with visual artistic representations

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<sup>89</sup> Young Imm Kang Song, "Art in Nature and Schools: Nils-Udo," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 3 (2010), 98.

<sup>90</sup> Song, "Art in Nature and Schools," 101.

<sup>91</sup> Song, 106.

<sup>92</sup> Rita Turner & Ryan Donnelly, "Case Studies in Critical Ecoliteracy: A Curriculum for Analyzing the Social Foundations of Environmental Problems," *Educational Studies* 49 (2013): 387-408.

<sup>93</sup> Turner & Donnelly, "Case Studies in Critical Ecoliteracy," 391.

of nature.<sup>94</sup> For example, a course instructor might ask students to compare a Rococo painting with images of Donald Judd's concrete blocks installation at the Chinati Foundation in the West Texas desert, and prompt students to analyze and compare the ways in which the two works gesture toward or position nature among or against human beings. Moreover, students are able to carry this thinking into natural spaces and consider nature itself as an artform. For example, how do trimmed shrubs in an English-style garden compare to an overgrown forest? Even if students are unable to physically go to an English-style garden or a forest preserve, nature is around in all contexts of human lived experience. Students can examine the way that grass creeps through cracks in concrete sidewalks or the way untrimmed trees droop into walkways, impeding one's way. If students are encouraged to view these phenomena *aesthetically* and think about them critically, an environmental sensibility can be inspired by art education.

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<sup>94</sup> Turner & Donnelly, 392.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### BEAUTY AS FAIRNESS: AESTHETICS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The goal of this dissertation has been to argue that an aesthetics of environment which foregrounds beauty as a perceptual frame can help learners and educators with moral thinking toward a nonexploitative coexistence among human and nonhuman others. In this chapter, I explore the educational act of perceiving nature and nonhuman others through the frame of beauty and how this perceptual sensibility might be useful to environmental education. Philosophers have noted the usefulness of aesthetics for understanding experiences of environment: Arnold Berleant notes that “perceptual sensitivity gains focus through a sense of the aesthetic dimensions of environmental experience.”<sup>1</sup> I argue though for a particular way of perceiving, one which foregrounds beauty as a perceptual frame. I engage with Scarry’s argument for beauty because she—following from Burke, Kant, and Schiller—associates beauty with moral thinking and ethical fairness.<sup>2</sup> Philosophers of education have likewise noted the use of beauty in particular for an education for environmental awareness and in education generally. Taking a cue from Ramsey Affifi, who argues for beauty as a light in the dark situation of environmental crisis and the role education plays therein, I am of the mind that an aesthetic of environment has an important role to play in educational theory. Affifi argues that even amidst hopelessness, “beauty can move us to action.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Angelo Caranfa advocates for a model of schooling and education which promotes the contemplation of “things of beauty” toward meaning of existence beyond the self.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford University Press, 1998); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Wener S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987); Friedrich Schiller, *The Aesthetic Education of Man*, Intr. Alexander Schmidt, trans. Keith Tribe (Penguin Random House UK, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Ramsey Affifi, “Beauty in the Darkness: Aesthetic Education in the Ecological Crisis,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54, no. 4 (2020): 1132.

<sup>4</sup> Angelo Caranfa, “Contemplative Instruction and the Gifts of Beauty, Love, and Silence,” *Educational Theory* 60, no. 5 (2010); 561.

With these ideas in mind, I explore the educational act of not just looking at but being in mindful sensual proximity to nature and nonhuman others, and, if physical proximity is not possible, to see the beauty in the everyday occurrences of nature that creep through and co-mingle with urban human habitat. I first outline Scarry's argument for the analogousness of perceiving beauty and extending ethical fairness to others; then, I draw on an encounter with periodical cicadas in an Ohio emergence area in order to illustrate how beauty can bring us into a relation of generosity and reciprocity with the nonhuman world. I look to the cicadas' symmetrical and symbiotic reciprocity with old forest trees and suggest such symmetrical relations as a model of not only beauty but of fair relations with others. Finally, I situate this symmetrical reciprocity within philosophy of education literature toward practical considerations for aesthetics for environmental education. Additionally, I explore the cultivation of a kind of sensibility that reconsiders an experience of beauty to be more than sensual delight, including consideration of teleological function toward ecological reciprocity.

### Perception

In this section, I explore what perception means for an aesthetics of environment in education. In *On Beauty*, Scarry argues that beauty “assists us in the work of addressing injustice ... by requiring of us constant perceptual acuity — high dives of seeing, hearing, touching ...”<sup>5</sup> I argue that perceptual exposure of some kind is not only helpful but perhaps necessary toward more just relations between humans and nonhuman beings and the natural environment. As Emily Brady explains in her book *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, aesthetic appreciation begins in perception.<sup>6</sup> While “all experience of the world begins in perception,” “perception lies at the centre of the *aesthetic* response” in particular. *Perception* has many dimensions and entails more than ocular or visual experiences: “it includes all of the different types of our sensory contact with the world — seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, combined with thoughts, imagining and beliefs.”<sup>7</sup> Both Scarry and Brady claim that appreciation requires a multi-sensuous experience of

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<sup>5</sup> Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 62.

<sup>6</sup> Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 123.

<sup>7</sup> Brady, 123.

environment.<sup>8</sup> According to Brady, the more senses we draw upon when we experience an environment, the thicker the sensuous engagement. Though *seeing* is the most common sense to aesthetic experience, what Brady calls *ocularcentrism* results in a thin experience of nature only and “is also responsible for some of the problems in ... the picturesque” model of aesthetic experience, which treats the nonhuman as instrumental to artistic viewing rather than valuable in and of itself.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as I discussed in chapter two, the privileging of the vision sense by Plato, Aristotle, and Kant resulted in a masculine and anthropocentric view of nature in which the ideal subject separates himself completely from a relation to or dependency on nature.

The contemplation of the perceptual (or phenomenal qualities) of objects characteristic of the aesthetic experience is sometimes contrasted with an interest in the function or utility of an object. “In this way,” says Brady, “the aesthetic response is typically contrasted with perception as a means to knowing the object, or an intellectual type of attention to it.” In an aesthetic perception, “our response is grounded in an immediate perceptual response rather than one that is mediated through knowledge or factual considerations.”<sup>10</sup> Appreciating nonhuman others and environments means more than simply *understanding* their functions and characteristics. As I’ve argued throughout this dissertation, scientific considerations alone are insufficient for the shift in attitudes required for ethical treatment of the nonhuman. As Elliot Eisner has pointed out in *Educating Artistic Vision*, when our surroundings are viewed aesthetically, we question and reflect on our sensory experiences and from this reflection develop a new consciousness of our surroundings.<sup>11</sup> For example, a tree

Can be viewed as an investment in the value of one’s property, as a species of flora, as a source of shade, or an expressive form that provides a certain quality of experience when one looks through its leaves just before sunset. The tree’s aesthetic features become salient when we choose to perceive the expressive features of the tree.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 62; Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 65.

<sup>9</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 124.

<sup>10</sup> Brady, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Elliot Eisner, *Educating Artistic Vision* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Elliot Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 232.



Through an aesthetic consideration, the perceiver experience new associations and attitudes toward the nonhuman. The delight, wonder, awe, and, as I argue later in the chapter, even the frustration of perplexity that aesthetic experiences with the nonhuman inspire prompt the perceiver to develop an emotional connection to the nonhuman rather than only an intellectual understanding. This attitudinal shift and the experiences that inspire it are what an education for environmental consciousness requires.

The reason that beauty in particular is a useful perceptual frame through which to see nature toward moral and nonexploitative relations is because of the “radical decentering” Scarry suggests occurs when we glimpse something beautiful. This radical decentering leads to a perceptual acuity such that when we enter into a moral relationship with the perceived, we engage in a symmetrical reciprocity. Berleant remarks that the power of perception does not stop at the momentary encounter between the beholder and the beheld: “perception has an aura to which memory, knowledge, and the conditioning and habits of the body all contribute.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, a carefully attended to perceptual experience can have a generative effect on other aspects of lived experience; a perceptual encounter might cause a shift in not only perception but knowledge and habit as well.

### **Beauty as Fairness**

Scarry’s argument for perceiving beauty in nature lends itself well to the environmental humanities because looking at nature through the frame of beauty begets a moral attitude. As discussed at various points in this dissertation, for Scarry, “an *ethical fairness* ... will be greatly assisted by an *aesthetic fairness*.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, beauty might serve “as a prelude or a precondition of enjoying fair relations with others.”<sup>15</sup> The word “fairness,” as Scarry points out, is used both to describe beauty — as in Snow White “the fairest of them all” — and ethical requirements — as in “being fair, playing fair and fair distribution.”<sup>16</sup> When traced to their etymological roots, the two uses of the word converge. The roots of the word “fair” in Old English, Old

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<sup>13</sup> Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 114.

<sup>15</sup> Scarry, 114.

<sup>16</sup> Scarry, 91.

Norse, Gothic, as well as Eastern European and Sanskrit “all originally express the aesthetic use of ‘fair’ to mean ‘beautiful’ or ‘fit’ — fit both in the sense of ‘pleasing to the eye’ and in the sense of ‘firmly placed,’ as when something matches or exists in accord with another thing’s shape or size.”<sup>17</sup> Scarry draws a connection between beauty as fairness and justice as fairness, using John Rawls’s definition of fairness “as a symmetry of everyone’s relation to each other.” Though Rawls did not have the nonhuman in mind when crafting his definition of justice and fairness, Scarry’s iteration of his theory of justice as attending to the *aliveness* of the subject of fairness translates to our treatment of the nonhuman. Says Scarry, “though it enters our discussions of justice less openly and less often than words such as ‘fairness’ and ‘equality,’ [aliveness] is what is centrally at stake in, and served by, both spheres.”<sup>18</sup> A self-evident characteristic of beautiful things, according to Scarry, is that they “give rise to the notion of distribution ... [and] to fairness not just in the sense of loveliness of aspect but in the sense of ‘a symmetry of everyone’s relation to one another.’”<sup>19</sup>

Scarry points out that *symmetry* is a quality that has been “most steadily singled out over centuries” of inquiries into the beautiful.<sup>20</sup> Symmetry is an important attribute for fairness, too, in the sense that symmetry in distribution of goods and attention is what leads to fairness. Indeed, the symbol of justice in Western thought is a pair of equally weighted and symmetrical scales. Rather than merely an analogy, the feature of symmetry as it pertains to beauty existed in human communities too young to have had time to bring about justice and exists in societies where justice has been taken away. In other words, the symmetry of all beings’ relations to one another does not, like justice, rely on humans to bring it about. Beauty is never absent from the natural world: “beautiful things hold steadily visible the manifest good of equality and balance.”<sup>21</sup>

Scarry’s theory of justice and beauty draws inspiration from Plato’s thinking on the association of beauty and moral goodness, especially as laid out in Diotima’s speech in *Symposium*.<sup>22</sup> Socrates recounts a

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<sup>17</sup> Scarry, 92.-93.

<sup>18</sup> Scarry, 93.

<sup>19</sup> Scarry, 95.

<sup>20</sup> Scarry, 96.

<sup>21</sup> Scarry, 97.

<sup>22</sup> Scarry, 4.

speech about love given to him by Diotima, a wise woman from Mantinea. The premise of her argument, as Socrates recounts, is that beauty is essential to the art of love (201D).<sup>23</sup> Diotima begins the story of Love by explaining that he was conceived between Poros and Penia (resource and poverty) during the celebration of the birth of Aphrodite (goddess of love and beauty). This is why Love, according to Diotima, is a lover of beauty, because he was conceived on the day of Aphrodite's birth. After explaining the parentage of Love and his enthrallment with beauty, Diotima poses this question to Socrates: what is the point of loving beautiful things (204D)?<sup>24</sup> Socrates promptly answers so "that they become [one's] own." Herein lies one of the most important critiques of beauty: that it is tied up in possessiveness, vanity, and objectification. However, Diotima explains that it isn't the case that Love wants to *possess* beauty:

“ ‘... You see, Socrates,’ she said, ‘what Love wants is not beauty, as you think it is.’

‘Well, what is it, then?’

‘Reproduction and birth in beauty’” (206E).<sup>25</sup>

As odd as this may at first seem, the idea of birth, or *begetting*, is generative in nature. If we desire to *reproduce* beauty, this is decidedly different than a desire to possess it. Scarry is in agreement when she writes that experiences of beauty prompt an unceasing generation: “beauty prompts the begetting of children: when the eye sees someone beautiful, the whole body wants to reproduce the person. But it also ... prompts the begetting of poems and laws ...” Moreover, “it also sponsors the idea of terrestrial plentitude and distribution, the will to make ‘more and more’ so that there will eventually be ‘enough.’”<sup>26</sup> As Diotima puts it, “reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality” (207A).<sup>27</sup> Multiplicity and abundance in resources is associated with moral kindness in ancient stories from Diotima's speech to Aristotle's *Politics* to Jesus's fish. Furthermore, the Platonic story of the conception of Love between Poros

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<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett, 1989), 45.

<sup>24</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 50.

<sup>25</sup> Plato, 53.

<sup>26</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 54.

and Penia — abundance and poverty — on the birthday of the goddess symbol of beauty, illustrates the association of beauty with moral fairness. Indeed, Scarry points out that, like beauty, equality and fairness of distribution is not only utilitarian but pleasure-bearing in itself: “...equality is the heart of beauty ... equality is pleasure-bearing, and ... (most important in the shift we are seeking to understanding from beauty to justice) equality is the morally highest and best feature of the world.”<sup>28</sup>

Kant, in his exploration of the human relationship to the rest of nature, posits the idea that our interest in nature might inspire our imaginative qualities which lead to ideas of lawfulness and reciprocity. Kant’s association of beauty with moral treatment, while not dependent on symmetry per se, is dependent on the apparent lawful reciprocity that exists between things in nature. In beholding this lawful reciprocity, *we* become attuned to moral thinking. In Kant’s teleological judgement in the *Third Critique*, beauty in nature is associated with its perceived purposiveness: the free play between imagination, understanding, and the thing perceived. The external purposiveness of beings and phenomena in nature make clear the *beziehung*: the reciprocal relations of things in nature.<sup>29</sup> When “something matches or exists in accord with” something else, not only is the symmetry associated with beauty clear, but, with it, a moral teleology reveals itself.

For these reasons, the notion of beauty and the perception of animals and things in the natural environment through the frame of beauty has an important place in an education which aims to cultivate an environmental sensibility.

### **Errors in Beauty**

A potential problem with beauty as a perceptual frame toward the moral treatment of the nonhuman is its subjectivity. I might perceive a frog perched on a lily pad in a small pond to be beautiful, but someone else might call that same scene unremarkable or even disgusting. Indeed, as discussed in chapter two, one issue many critics of Kant take with his aesthetics is its reliance on a universalizing objectivity when it comes to beauty. However, the objectivity Kant supposes in experiences of beauty in nature is tied to nature’s

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<sup>28</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 98.

<sup>29</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 337.

teleological purposiveness. If an understanding of this purposiveness is the end goal of an aesthetics for environmental education, then a conceptualization of beauty which serves that end is the goal. Also discussed in chapter two is the teachability of aesthetic appreciation that thinkers like Hume and Voltaire posited. Both described aesthetic appreciation as a developed sensibility rather than an innate aptitude. A sensibility, or ability to appreciate and respond to an aesthetic object, is thought to be not an aptitude one is born with but a sensitivity that is refined and developed through exposure and experience.<sup>30</sup> When we say, for example, “she has a refined taste,” we are making a claim about a sensibility that has changed over time. If the ability to appreciate beauty in nature is an aesthetic sensibility, that means we get it wrong sometimes. The getting it wrong is a valuable part of the process of an education for an environmental awareness. The frames through which children encounter nonhuman nature for the first time might be wonder and astonishment but may also be fear and disgust. The exclamation of “eeewwwwww!” when a child first watches a worm emerge from the earth comes to mind. Not only children, but people of all ages have moments like this when we encounter an unfamiliar food or a seemingly strange work of art for the first time. The strange and unfamiliar begets feelings of discomfort and bewilderment. The job of an education for environmental consciousness is to guide students through the process of unlearning bad aesthetics: the ways in which they—indeed, all of us—have been conditioned to see the nonhuman world. This is a process of not only unlearning a bad aesthetic, but cultivating a new one, an ecoaesthetic, which might also involve reconceptualizing what an experience of beauty entails.

Kant described beauty as an experience in which our imagination is in harmony with our understanding. Perceptual experiences that are challenging or disruptive to our understanding, on the other hand, are not typically considered beautiful. Unfamiliarity breeds contempt. We can all think of something that we disliked before we had much exposure to it, but, after exposure and experience, the disliked thing might reveal itself to be a favorite thing. For example, as a kid, I was horrified by thunderstorms because I didn’t know much about them and was sure they would kill me instantly if I ventured out of the closet I hid

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<sup>30</sup> David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste,” *Modern History Sourcebook: David Hume (1711-1776)*, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1760hume-taste.asp>.

in. However, as an adult, and after lots of exposure and newfound knowledge, I now find thunderstorms to be beautiful. Lack of exposure can cause what Scarry refers to as an error in beauty. We wrongly withhold justice and care from beings or phenomena which are unknown or unfamiliar.<sup>31</sup> Scarry characterizes this lack of care for or even revulsion toward something as an “error in beauty.” She describes two possible errors: one is realizing that something previously thought beautiful no longer deserves to be so regarded. The second is the realization that something from which the attribution was withheld deserved it all along. She finds the latter error to be graver and calls this error a “failed generosity.”<sup>32</sup> Human societal practices regularly operate under such a failed generosity. Most people care somewhat for beings and things in the nonhuman world to which they have had exposure: for example, dogs, cats, certain kinds of birds, butterflies, and flowers. Most people agree that these beings should be cared for and preserved. The same might not be said of things that seem more alien or signify abjection: slugs, spiders, opossums, for example. Indeed, Cris Mayo’s essay “Vermin, the Proximate and Often Unpleasant Stranger,” attends to our relationships with “animals with whom we interact . . . although they may arouse worry or even disgust.”<sup>33</sup> Mayo discusses so-called vermin such as mice who infiltrate human houses, racoons who rustle trash, and frogs who seek relief from cold winters in windows. Mayo is concerned with the challenges these beings “pose to thinking ethically about relationships between human and non-human animals.”<sup>34</sup> In particular, that our proximity and inadvertent relationships with these beings has the potential to start what Mayo calls “a process of rethinking.” The encounters we experience with these undesirable nonhuman others have the potential to invoke “additional consideration of the animal and their relationship to humans and the environment.”<sup>35</sup> Mayo, in naming the vermin “unpleasant strangers,” makes the good point that “our relationships with animals or any kind of vermin need not be pleasant to be ethical.” Indeed, “some of our closest relationships,” whether they be with

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<sup>31</sup> Cris Mayo, “Vermin, the Proximate and Often Unpleasant Stranger,” in *The Educational Significance of Human and Non-Human Animal Interactions*, eds. Suzanne Rice and A.G. Rud (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 191-202.

<sup>32</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Mayo, “Vermin,” 191.

<sup>34</sup> Mayo, 191.

<sup>35</sup> Mayo, 200.

other humans or nonhumans, “begin unpleasantly but move into ethical cooperation.”<sup>36</sup> Relatedly, Mary Louis Pratt says of the “interspecies contact zone ... Relations of companionship, cooperation, competition ... suspicion, love, dependency, and avoidance unfold” all at once. Specifically, Pratt points to rats in the New York City subway: certainly proximate and unpleasant strangers, but, nevertheless, humans and rats have “negotiated a voiceless, symmetrical relationship.”<sup>37</sup>

Mayo’s and Pratt’s arguments that our experience of a being need not be pleasant to be ethical might at first seem to undercut Scarry’s that beings and things ought to be conferred with the esteem of beauty toward an ethical consideration, but I don’t think these arguments are contradictory. In fact, experiences of beauty are not always pleasant. As discussed in chapter two, first Edmund Burke and then Kant bifurcated experiences of the sublime and the beautiful. Feelings of terror and astonishment were reserved for the sublime and beauty became associated with delight and pleasantness. However, Dante and Rilke’s association of beauty with perplexity and terror, cited in chapter two, calls into question what an experience of beauty could entail. If the expectation is that experiences of beauty at the behest of nonhuman nature bring on merely feelings of delight and pleasantness, perhaps this points to a hubris on the part of human beings and their positionality in nature.<sup>38</sup> A wrongheaded sense of separation from or even dominance over nonhuman nature might invite a deceptive distancing to occur between the human cognitive experience of the nonhuman being or environment itself. This distancing is aided by the human sense of built environment. According to Berleant, “our vulnerability to the directness of perceptual experience has been layered over with the hard veneer of what we deceptively call civilization.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, for something to be deemed beautiful as that term is typically understood, it mustn’t challenge or disrupt the clear demarcations between

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<sup>36</sup> Mayo, 191.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Louis Pratt, *Planetary Longings* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2022), 134.

<sup>38</sup> Jane Roland Martin, “Renouncing Human Hubris and Reeducating Commonsense,” *Studies in Philosophy & Education* 36, no. 3 (2017): 283-298.

<sup>39</sup> Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, 2.

nature and culture, human and nonhuman. However, a reconceptualization of the beauty experience could expand what this experience can mean.

Brady notes that “aesthetic” has developed a connotation of positive value, often used to describe something that has only attractive qualities. However, “aesthetic value proper covers the wide range of judgements we make, from finding something stunningly beautiful, to finding something sublime, to finding something ugly, with a lot of variety in between.” If we are to broaden aesthetic discussions to include the natural environment and nonhuman others, we’ll need to expand our understanding of aesthetic value “beyond the attractive and scenic. Moreover, many phenomena viewed as unscenic or uninteresting, may be found to have positive value if we make more of an aesthetic effort and pay more attention.”<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, beauty is often associated with delight and pleasantness.<sup>41</sup> An aesthetic appreciation of the nonhuman will require a reconceptualization of the beauty experience that takes account for feelings other than delight. Even though, in Kant’s aesthetics, beauty is associated with pleasantness and charm and puts the imagination in harmony with understanding, this experience can still move beyond the merely charming. As Brady points out,

Not all imaginative revelations are pleasant and positive. Imaginative engagement also reveals the horror and suffering of humanity and the natural world. Witnessing human evil, natural disasters, or even the everyday encounter of a cat stalking and killing a bird, all strike imagination in ways that spread meaning more deeply ...<sup>42</sup>

With this in mind, an important element of an aesthetics for environmental education will be to reconceptualize what an experience of beauty can entail. As discussed in chapter two, if we reunite beauty with the sublime, the beauty experience can be both pleasing and disarming; imaginative and disruptive; delightful and shocking. Says Brady, “the variety of nature demands an openness to appreciation of atypical

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<sup>40</sup> Brady, 21.

<sup>41</sup> I discuss the history of beauty’s association with charm, delight, and pleasantness, as well as the gendered implications of this history, in chapter two.

<sup>42</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 158.



aesthetic objects—gators on dung heaps, beetles and mudflats—not just pretty flowers, sunsets and dramatic mountainscapes.<sup>43</sup>

Another reason to understand the beauty experience in this way with regard to nature, is aesthetic appreciation makes little sense if its exclusive purpose is the production of pleasure.

If it were, then presumably any sort of experience that afforded ...pleasure would do ...We could, for the sake of argument, suggest that on this view, taking a drug would be an acceptable substitute if it produced the same effect. But it would be odd to accept such a substitute for our actual experiences of aesthetic qualities. With all this said, it is also worth pointing out that the aesthetic response is not exclusively connected to pleasure. Sometimes we feel dismay, curiosity, shock and so on in our aesthetic encounters.<sup>44</sup>

As Mayo, Pratt, and Brady make clear, though “nature isn’t always nice and pretty,” a rethinking of the beauty experience has the potential to “engender an attitude of respect for the natural environment.”<sup>45</sup> This attitude of respect has pragmatic ramifications as well, according to Yuriko Saito, “particularly today as we struggle to find an alternative to our problematic attitude toward nature evidenced by our indifference to ‘unscenic’ aspects of nature, such as invertebrates, weeds, and wetlands, leaving them vulnerable to destruction.”<sup>46</sup>

Since the aesthetic appeal of an object is a powerful incentive for its protection, many environmentalists, beginning with Aldo Leopold, are concerned with cultivating a different aesthetic sensibility toward those seemingly unattractive aspects of nature. The willingness to cast aside our ordinary standards and expectations for aesthetic value and appreciate each object and material for its own sake can thus contribute to nurturing this sorely needed sensibility.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, beauty can still be a useful perceptual frame even toward an “unpleasant stranger,” especially if such failed generousities toward lesser known and lesser liked beings are reframed as errors in beauty, as Scarry suggests. Scarry describes her own error: she “had ruled out palm trees as objects of beauty and ... one day ... discovered [she] had made a mistake.”<sup>48</sup> Though a far cry from Mayo’s vermin or Brady’s

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<sup>43</sup> Brady, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Brady, 24.

<sup>45</sup> Brady, 67.

<sup>46</sup> Yuriko Saito, “The Moral Dimension of Japanese Aesthetics,” *The Journal of aesthetics and art criticism* 65, no. 1 (2007), 88.

<sup>47</sup> Saito, “The Moral Dimension of Japanese Aesthetics,” 88.

<sup>48</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 10.

gators on dung heaps, palm trees were nevertheless something Scarry claimed to have disliked. When she encounters a palm tree, close up, she realizes her error.<sup>49</sup> Suddenly something heretofore she cared nothing for at all, even disliked, has shown itself to be magnificent, inspiring, sublime, beautiful. She notes that it was the palm tree's absence in her proximal visual perception as they exist on a coast not her own — her lack of having *seen* many or even one at all close up. I'm not arguing here that we start to feel about vermin the way that Scarry came to feel about palm trees. But we might take into consideration a rethinking, as Mayo, Pratt, Brady, and Saito suggest, or a reorientation toward the nonhuman which recognizes the potential for beauty.

### **Rethinking an Unpleasant Stranger: Cicadas**

To bring the idea of errors in beauty into a discussion of human and nonhuman relationships, I would like to share my own error in beauty. This error also occurred because of lack of exposure, though rather than hemispherical separation, as in Scarry's example, mine was an issue of ground separation: above versus below.

In the summer of 2021, one of the largest broods of periodical cicadas appeared across 15 US states for the first time in 17 years. Visiting an area outside Columbus, Ohio, I found myself in what naturalists call an "emergence area." Cicadas were everywhere, their collective chirps at times deafening. While fearful of the archaic-looking bugs flying into my hair and taking up residence there, after doing some reading in the *Columbus Dispatch* about their unique lifecycles and ecological contributions, as well as encountering them in the old forests surrounding the area, seeing them spring and cluster above trees, jump and sputter, and, above all, chirp in a choral cacophony, I began to find them beautiful.

Researchers estimate periodical cicadas to be more than five million years old. Some, including the current brood, known as Brood X, emerge every 17 years and "spend the vast majority of their life underground sipping on the sap of tree roots."<sup>50</sup> They emerge for only a few weeks to mate and then die. But they're doing important work while underground: "the roots of trees and plants have fluid flowing through

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<sup>49</sup> Scarry, 16.

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Bowman, London Gibson, and Beth Burger, "Latest arrival of cicadas could offer insight whether climate change, loss of habitat will silence them," *The Columbus Dispatch* (20, May, 2021): 4A.

them that cicadas sip out with a straw-like tongue, growing bigger over the years until it's their time to tunnel out."<sup>51</sup> The cicadas make important ecological contributions. Throughout their 17-year slumber, "they're ... aerating the soil, which helps roots absorb water and nutrients."<sup>52</sup> Cicada carcasses also fertilize the same trees they spend "nearly two decades latched onto."<sup>53</sup> This cycle has become especially important in light of climate change. The emergence, reproduction, and death of cicadas are the building blocks of forest floors, and forests counterbalance climate change caused by human activity.

Both climate change and human infrastructure developments threaten forests, and thereby threaten cicadas. The numbers in which they emerge are an important evolutionary defense against predators, enabling them to survive long enough to reproduce. Harsh seasons due to climate change and deforestation for development reduce cicadas' numbers. "In just the last century, cicadas have all but disappeared from certain historical breeding grounds as forests made way for development," according to a report in the *Columbus Dispatch*; "Other groups of cicadas are emerging years early and without protection in numbers, which many scientists attribute to warmer summers and harsher winters that disrupt the cicadas' sense of timing." According to John Cooley, an ecology and evolutionary biology professor at the University of Connecticut, "cicadas depend on an interconnected network of forests to survive and thrive," and when trees are felled for developments, the cicadas get trapped underground. Significant changes in weather patterns over time due to climate change can also cause cicadas to emerge at the wrong time. Experts agree "the best way to protect cicadas is also one of the strongest tools for fighting climate change: protecting trees."<sup>54</sup>

Although the bumbling, winged creatures pop into the *public eye* only once every other decade, it's important for humans to understand the impact they're having on their populations ... A cicada year has long been considered a symbol of nature's bounty and reminder of the forest's wellbeing. 'Cicadas are in some ways a long-term barometer of environmental health,' ... 'If we see the cicadas declining, then over time that tells us that something's wrong. We need to really be *paying attention*.'<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Bowman, et. al., "Latest arrival of cicadas," 4A.

<sup>52</sup> Bowman, et. al., 4A.

<sup>53</sup> Bowman, et. al., 4A.

<sup>54</sup> Bowman, et. al., 4A.

<sup>55</sup> Bowman, et. al., 4A. Emphases mine.

Because the periodic cicadas spend the majority of their lifecycle underground, hidden from human view, and then suddenly emerge in a multiplicitous chirping cacophony, they are a good candidate for the phenomenon of the radical decentering Scarry describes at the sight of meeting between the beholder and the beheld. In the following section, I discuss what can happen, what ought to happen, when we sensually perceive nature and reconceptualize experiences of beauty.

### **Rethinking Beauty: Knowledge and Perception**

Because the cicadas spend the majority of their lifecycle underground, outside of the human perceptual field, opportunities to behold them and experience such a decentering transformation at their behest are few and far between. Perhaps this helps explain my error in beauty described above. But the cicadas made themselves known to me, piqued my curiosity, and ultimately made some small but important shift in my sensibility toward the world around me and the role I and my behaviors play in the world. Leading up to my trip to Ohio, I had been warned about the mass cicada emergence and how the creatures were swarming and jumping on people; I was obsessively worried about this. The idea of these prehistoric-looking bugs jumping at me brought on feelings of not only fear but visceral disgust. Fear and disgust often accompany lack of exposure, as in Mayo's vermin or Brady's gators on dung heaps.

However, when I found myself in midst of the cicadas, I found my inner experience to be one of intrigue and curiosity. I started reading about the cicadas, and, with new knowledge coupled with perceptual exposure, my perception of them completely changed. This change was especially potent when I learned about the symbiotic relationship between the cicadas and the mature beautiful trees that I love most about Ohio visits. I saw the beauty in the cicadas after learning about their ecological function, and realized I had generosity toward them after all—I wanted to be fair and regard them with fairness. With an ecological awareness came a sense of ethics and fairness—an ecoaesthetic awareness. Scarry describes this kind of educative encounter this way:

...this quality of heightened attention is voluntarily extended out to other persons or things. It is as though beautiful things have been placed here and there throughout the world to serve as small wake-up calls to perception, spurring lapsed alertness back to its most acute

level. Through its beauty, the world continually recommits us to a rigorous standard of perceptual care: if we do not search it out, it comes and finds us.<sup>56</sup>

My educational encounter with the cicadas would likely have not happened if the cicadas had not emerged in such numbers, taken up so much space, and been so present in my proximity. They emerged and compelled me to see them and to wonder about them. These tiny wake-up calls and “the rigorous standard of perceptual care” they inspire are invaluable educational moments; it is this kind of perceptual care, the experiences that might inspire it, that I propose be made a part of an education for environmental consciousness. This might mean allotting more unstructured time for wandering in nature, or perhaps a representation of the nonhuman world in literature, art, and even natural science classes that positions it as beautiful, as artful, as something of valuable aesthetic importance. Most of all, this kind of education will be greatly assisted by visual exposure and proximity; and, finally, a reconceptualization of the things in nature one sees and beholds. This reconceptualization will be assisted by an education which emphasizes the potential for beauty.

Although Kant characterizes judgements of beauty as being divorced from concepts, he doesn't completely dismiss the idea that there are unavoidable concepts floating around in the background of one's thoughts when experiencing an aesthetic judgement.<sup>57</sup> Kant explains that there are two types of beauty: free beauty and accessory beauty. The difference between the two is that “free beauty does not presuppose a concept of what the object is meant to be;” on the other hand, “accessory beauty *does* presuppose such a concept.”<sup>58</sup> Accessory beauty is accessory to its concept or particular purpose. Only the judgement of *free* beauty is a “pure” judgement of taste for Kant.<sup>59</sup> However, it doesn't seem true that things for which we can conceive of some purpose don't inspire direct interest. For instance, Kant uses a flower as an example of free beauty, claiming “hardly anyone apart from the botanist knows what sort of thing a flower is meant to be.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 81.

<sup>57</sup> ‘A judgement of taste about an object with a definite intrinsic purpose would be pure only if the person judging either had no concept of this purpose, or abstracted from it in making his judgement’ (*CJ*, §16, 231) 33.

<sup>58</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 76. Italics mine.

<sup>59</sup> Kant, 77.

<sup>60</sup> Kant, 77.

I'm not a botanist, but I understand that flowers serve the function of pollination and the reproduction of plants which serve all kinds of other ecological systems. Even knowing this, I can still experience an appreciation of a flower as an object of beauty. In fact, knowing the ecological function of the flower *seems* my judgement of its beauty.

If we take Brady's cue and depart slightly from Kant's "pure judgement of beauty," there is room for coupling some prior or present knowledge of an object of aesthetic perception with present perceptual experience. Brady uses the example of reading an information board on a nature walk: "we may consciously feed [the new knowledge] in in order to supplement perception ... the knowledge may enable an expansion of perception of aesthetic qualities."<sup>61</sup> The knowledge I gained about the cicada's ecological functions served my perceptual experience of them. The beauty experience I had at their behest was heightened by what I learned about them in the *Dispatch*. Kant himself even claims that a perception of nature's purposiveness serves our aesthetic perception of it. For Kant, when we judge things in nature, we "also take into account their objective purposiveness in order to judge their beauty ... we then judge nature no longer as it appears as art, but insofar as it actually *is* art, and so we make a teleological judgment that serves the aesthetic one."<sup>62</sup> This is the work of fine art, says Kant: "it describes things beautifully that in nature we would dislike or find ugly."<sup>63</sup> For example, Brady discusses that her appreciation of butterflies is shaped by her background knowledge of the "story of the butterfly" as first a monochromatic caterpillar who eventually emerges with wings of vibrant colors: the knowledge of the telos of the caterpillar "becomes a legitimate part of aesthetic appreciation because it adds meaning to the perceptual qualities I enjoy."<sup>64</sup>

### **Aesthetics for Environmental Education**

What might an education for ethical fairness toward a cicada or a tree look like? In other words, how can we educate for a symmetrical reciprocity? As aforementioned, exposure and proximity are the first steps.

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<sup>61</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 137.

<sup>62</sup> Kant, 179.

<sup>63</sup> Kant, 180.

<sup>64</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 138.

As philosophers of ecological and environmental education have pointed out, institutions of education are not attentive enough to nature.<sup>65</sup> This inattentiveness perpetuates lack of exposure to nonhuman things and the failed generosity brought on by errors in beauty as I've described in this chapter. Rita Turner and Ryan Donnelly advocate for pedagogical strategies that make environmental awareness an “express aim of education.”<sup>66</sup> LeAnn Holland as well offers a helpful proposal in her essay “An Element-ary Education,” in which she aims “to resituate human bodies and minds *in* the natural environment.”<sup>67</sup> Holland argues for exposing students to the elements, as an education confined to indoor spaces can never truly be experiential.<sup>68</sup> By sealing students “off from weather in ‘air-controlled,’ four-walled classrooms ... weather becomes a field trip or project day only, sending the message to students that weather, while important content, is only to be ‘visited’ on sunny days,” Holland argues.<sup>69</sup> In other words, “*weather* ... is a subject to be taught,”<sup>70</sup> rather than an experience to be had. This idea rings true of all nonhuman phenomena and beings: when regarded only as abstract subjects of study, they are not regarded as real, live processes and beings that we are interrelated to and with. Moreover, as Holland argues, the nonhuman environment “has the power to provoke transformational learning. But without experience *in* these elements, without *exposure*, students lack the necessary conditions for such moments.”<sup>71</sup> But exposure alone is not enough, and also the kind of exposure Holland calls for may not be entirely possible in the locational or geographic contexts of some educational institutions. Looking, beholding, being adjacent to are insufficient for a truly transformational educational process as it concerns the nonhuman environment. If ethical fairness is to be extended to the nonhuman and reciprocity is to be achieved, the nonhuman ought to be included in social justice education.

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<sup>65</sup> Martin, “Renouncing Human Hubris.”

<sup>66</sup> Rita Turner & Ryan Donnelly, “Case Studies in Critical Ecoliteracy: A Curriculum for Analyzing the Social Foundations of Environmental Problems,” *Educational Studies* 49 (2013): 387.

<sup>67</sup> LeAnn Holland, “An Element-ary Education,” *Philosophy of Education* (2015): 352.

<sup>68</sup> Holland, “An Element-ary Education,” 251.

<sup>69</sup> Holland, 251.

<sup>70</sup> Holland, 252.

<sup>71</sup> Holland, 252.

For such an inclusion to take place, though, “nature” must be a part of education in a more meaningful way than currently happens. Morwenna Griffiths points out that the relationship between the human and more-than-human is “seldom recognized as contributing to a more socially just education.”<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Turner and Donnelly argue that

Education must help students develop the skills and habits to critique the cultural norms, structures, and forces at work in society that operate to constitute and reproduce unjust and unsustainable attitudes about other people, other living beings, and the land ... and evaluate a curriculum designed around this goal.<sup>73</sup>

One way toward such a goal is to prompt students to interrogate social and cultural conceptions of beauty, especially how those impact how we relate to and engage with the nonhuman. Expanding what an experience of beauty can mean and extending the potential for beauty to nonhuman others and spaces typically thought of as ugly or disgusting calls into question internalized cultural norms about what kinds of things matter in the world and what kinds of things are worthy of care and ethical treatment. As I discussed in the previous chapter, how we ask students to engage with artistic representations of the nonhuman is a productive avenue to spark these kinds of analyses.

An education for an aesthetics of environment also requires that we critically examine our relationship to the nonhuman, even if we reside in spaces where “nature” is seemingly absent. When students view nature as an abstract space that exists on another plane or geographically removed from oneself, an attitude of apathy or even fear too easily creeps into consciousness. As discussed in the previous chapter, artforms which gesture toward human society’s interrelatedness to the nonhuman can help students to rethink these binaries. Morweena Griffiths offers a reading of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women* that considers the educational relationships “between human beings and the rest of the natural world, the more-than-human.”<sup>74</sup> Griffiths notes of Wollstonecraft, “in her pedagogical proposals she does not

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<sup>72</sup> Holland, “An Element-ary Education,” 252.

<sup>73</sup> Turner & Donnelly, “Case Studies in Critical Ecoliteracy,” 388.

<sup>74</sup> Morwenna Griffiths, “Educational Relationships: Rousseau, Wollstonecraft and Social Justice,” *Journal of Philosophy Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 339.



impose a sharp demarcation between what is indoors and outdoors, what is wild from what is social.”<sup>75</sup>

Nature is complex in how it intersects with our human activities and how we intersect with its. As Griffiths explains,

It is all of: organic, inorganic, indoors, outdoors, and both; of our bodies, in our bodies and beyond them ... growing, inanimate; beautiful, grim; huge, minute, and all sizes between; mysterious, wild, ordinary ... and a force to be struggled with.<sup>76</sup>

Further, Berleant claims that a conception of nature which puts “human beings apart from their environment is both philosophically unfounded and scientifically false, and it leads to disastrous practical consequences.”

Berleant places some of the blame for this conception “on the tradition, embedded in Western culture since classical Greece, that associates experience primarily with seeing and vision with the intellect,”<sup>77</sup> which I also discuss in chapter two. The so-called “distance sense” of vision was privileged by everyone from Plato to Kant and made everything on the other end of the perceptual experience merely objects of contemplation. Griffiths and Berleant are both critical of the treatment of nonhuman spaces and landscapes as mere objects of contemplation; rather, they ought to be understood as dynamic *environments* of which we are a part.

Therefore, the incorporation of all of our bodily senses into the perceptual experience of nature is important to an active participation in the experiential process. Appreciation of nature *as environment* as Berleant proposes involves more than “just looking approvingly at lovely scenery;” it’s involves consideration of the roads we drive on and what may have been paved over so that road exists; the hiking trails we walk on and what life we may be disturbing underfoot; the streams we swim in and the inhabitants we may be disrupting. Appreciation of environment also involves “the deep awareness, so rare in the contemporary world, of living in ... spaces that incorporate us. *Incorporate* is a good word here, for it means literally to bring our bodies in, and this engagement in a whole is what the aesthetic experience of environment involves.”<sup>78</sup> “At the same

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<sup>75</sup> Griffiths, “Educational Relationships,” 350.

<sup>76</sup> Griffiths, 350.

<sup>77</sup> Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, 12.

<sup>78</sup> Berleant, 13.

time,” says Berleant, in addition to “embodied experience, we carry our knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes with us” as we judge environment aesthetically and shape our attitudes based on those judgements.<sup>79</sup>

### **Symmetrical Reciprocity**

An education which attends to the pervasiveness of the nonhuman in our human existence and the (perhaps unknown or recognized) intimacy of our needs and values with those of the nonhuman, would prompt an environmental awareness that lends itself to the extension of ethical fairness to include the nonhuman. Conferring beauty is a starting point for this. But it isn't enough simply to regard something as beautiful as we typically conceive of such an experience; it must be considered as the subject of justice and fairness. We ought to, as Scarry says, confer life on the other-than and more-than-human. By attending to the aliveness of a being, an act Scarry thinks beauty requires of us, and I agree, we, as perceivers, enter into a contract with the beautiful being. If symmetry signifies not only beauty but also a purposive reciprocity, then I look to the cicadas once again as providing a model for symmetry as ethical fairness. As explained above, the cicadas suck the sap from tree roots underground, but after they have emerged, reproduced, and then died, their carcasses decompose at the base of those same trees and provide vital nutrients for the soil which then feeds the root of the trees. And so, there is a symmetry to the relations of the trees and cicadas as well as a fairness of distribution. In the same way that the cicadas and trees are fair to each other, we might mimic that fair relation in *our* treatment of the cicadas and trees, indeed all beings and things in the nonhuman world. Scarry describes this perceptual acuity to beauty and symmetry therein to affirm “the equality of aliveness” in the thing perceived.<sup>80</sup>

The beholder and beheld form an enclosed circumference in which the two exchange a reciprocal salute to the continuation of one another's existence ... this two-member salute becomes ... so that what is achieved is an inclusive affirmation of the ongoingness of existence, and of one's own responsibility for the continuity of existence.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Berleant, 13.

<sup>80</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 92.

<sup>81</sup> Scarry, 92.

Each member of the salute affirms the aliveness of the other. A reconsideration of nature as proximate no matter where we live, as interrelated to our actions and behaviors no matter how unrelated the two may seem, is a key element of an education for environmental consciousness. Beauty is a powerful frame through which to perceive the nonhuman because what we find beautiful is what we value, what we care for, and what we think is worthy of fairness. An aesthetic education that is interspersed throughout humanities classrooms which encourages students to examine both how the nonhuman is represented in art and in everyday experience is a potential way forward for the cultivation of environmental consciousness.

### Conclusion

To conclude, I want to make one final case for beauty's place in an education for environmental consciousness. Nature is around all the time whether we are there to perceive it or not; nature's processes do not stop when we look away. Unlike justice on its own, beauty in nature does not depend on humans to bring it about. We all hope for a world that contains both justice and beauty, but beauty is always available to our perception even when justice is not. I concede that the jumps from teleological purposiveness to contemporary thinking on ecology, to environmental education are big ones, but the conversation which bridges these is worth having. Moreover, we ought to think of the *environment* not as a space to gaze upon or visit once in a while, but as a space of which we are a part and *incorporates* us, as Berleant puts it: "An integral whole, environment is an interrelated and interdependent union of people and place, together with their reciprocal processes."<sup>82</sup> If we understand the environment as something of which we are but one piece, the reciprocity required of us becomes clear: "the symmetry of all of our relations to each other" extends outward to the other than and more than human. An education which attends to the environment in this way — by prompting students to see the nonhuman through an aesthetic point of view — inspires the kind of emotional attachment necessary to reshape attitudes toward the nonhuman. If perceiving beauty leads to fairness and reciprocity, as I have explored in this chapter, then perhaps the beauty of nature serves as a wake-up call to justice when it is not as readily perceived.

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<sup>82</sup> Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, 14.

Holland's paper reminded me of a relevant scene in Plato's the *Phaedrus*,<sup>83</sup> when the city-dwelling Socrates is dragged out to the countryside. Socrates is surprisingly enchanted by all the sensations of the natural world around him: the sparkling river, the soft grass, and *the sound of cicadas*. All of these sensations beckoned Socrates' attention, just as the chorus of cicada chirps echoing off the trees in the forest beckoned me. Therein lies beauty's power to inspire in us generosity and move us to ethical fairness: beauty in nature is always there to spur our lapsed alertness to fairness: "beauty is a call."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Holland, "An Element-ary Education," 354.

<sup>84</sup> Scarry, *On Beauty*, 109.

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Before attending Loyola University Chicago to pursue her PhD, Annie Schultz earned a Master of Arts in the Humanities, with a concentration in English, from the University of Chicago in 2013 and a Bachelor of Arts in English, with a minor in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, from Texas State University in 2012.

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Currently, Dr. Schultz is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Miami University. She has also taught courses in the social foundations of education at Monmouth College since 2021 and Dominican University since 2020. Dr. Schultz has also taught college writing and English courses since 2014.