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ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS

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It. *Estetica ambientale*; Fr. *Esthétique environnementale*; Germ. *Umweltästhetik*; Span. *Estética ambiental*.

Environmental aesthetics is a subfield of philosophical aesthetics and environmental philosophy that emerges in the late 1960s, mainly in reaction to the emphasis in aesthetics on the philosophy of art, especially within the analytic tradition. While retrieving elements of the traditional philosophy and aesthetics of nature, Environmental Aesthetics deals with varied issues such as the appreciation of wild nature and natural environments, the enjoyment of the sublime and the picturesque, in gardens as in landscapes, and the aesthetics of the everyday life.

THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Although until Kant's *Critique of Judgment* it was quite commonplace to think about beauty and aesthetic experience with reference to nature, natural beauty has subsequently sunk into oblivion for almost two centuries. However, in the last four decades an increasing interest in nature, in the aesthetic appreciation of it and in the natural environment in general has come again to the fore. This has not only had the effect of bringing a philosophical reflection on nature back into the contemporary debate, but it has also called to a revision of the very meaning of aesthetics and of its topics.

Pioneer in promoting the development of Environmental Aesthetics, Ronald Hepburn's article, *Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty* (1966), has the merit of putting into light the main issue: how does an aesthetic appreciation of nature differ from an appreciation of artworks? The core of the answer lays in the position of the observer, that is to say in the experience of being immersed in environments, having a fully sensorial experience and having the freedom to explore nature without those frameworks and boundaries, which are instead typical of works of art.

Starting from Hepburn's definition of environmental aesthetics, the contemporary debate, assuming the freedom of natural environments as distinguished from works of art, investigates in what ways this kind of aesthetic appreciation can affect our experience and judgment. To the established distinction of the contemporary debate into two main fronts, those of *cognitivism* and *noncognitivism*, one can also add nowadays, as Paolo D'angelo suggests, the following three positions: the atmospheric model, geophilosophy and the landscape aesthetics (D'Angelo 2008).

1. Cognitivists argue that in order to have an "appropriate" aesthetic appreciation of nature we need to guide our experience by means of the natural sciences' concepts and structures (D'Angelo 2006). As the main representative of this position, Allen Carlson has been supporting, since the 1970s, the idea of a fundamental bond between our aesthetic experience and the scientific knowledge of the environment. In the aesthetic judgment on nature we do not consider only its sensible qualities, but we also organize these qualities according to scientific categories, validated by scientists and naturalists. Based on this perspective, natural history and natural sciences provide the appropriate criteria for an aesthetic appreciation of nature (Carlson 2002).
2. Often in objection to Carlson's approach, non-cognitivists (or formalists) underscore the subjective aspects of the aesthetic experience (in reference, for example, to multisensory engagement, imagination, and emotion) and support the idea that an aesthetic appreciation of nature is not determined by our scientific knowledge but rather by our disposition to let ourselves be amazed. Within this framework, Arnold Berleant highlights the importance of a sensory immersion and of an active and embodied appreciation, that aims to involve the observer in a total immersion in the object of appreciation (Berleant 2012). According to these ideas, some non-cognitive approaches provide nowadays relevant contributions to the description of a model for the aesthetic appreciation not only of art and nature, but also of the other aspects of everyday experience. This kind of approach focuses not only on natural but also on urban environments, finding a connection with contemporary theories on aestheticization and with the so called everyday aesthetics. Sharing the same non-cognitive approach, Noël Carroll advocates a distinctive perspective on the environment, as he stresses the fundamental role of our emotional responses in the aesthetic appreciation of nature. Carroll (1993), like then Malcolm Budd (2002) and Nick Zangwill (2001), traces back his non-cognitivist approach to Kant's aesthetic formalism and plays in the contemporary debate the notion of natural beauty derived from Kant's account.
3. The notion of atmosphere is prominent in a quite unique approach to environmental aesthetic, targeting the perceptive totality of our experience in the environment. Gernot Böhme (2017) shows how our experience of nature could play a leading heuristic role in the very definition of aesthetics. According to Böhme's account, our perception is always synaesthetic and what we actually perceive are atmospheres, understood as quasi-things (Griffero 2017). Atmospheres refer notably to the link between environmental qualities and the emotional state of the subject, thereby partially retrieving Baumgarten's definition of aesthetics as theory of sensibility and promoting the knowledge of those aspects of nature disregarded by modern natural sciences. By including a reference to German Romanticism and by employing the notion of landscape physiognomic, Böhme nurtures a direct relationship with nature as a perceptive experience.

4. Geophilosophy is the term employed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the 1990s in order to define the relationship between philosophy and space, understood as geography of thought. Geophilosophy acquires then a political undertone while supporting the investigation, for instance, of the opposition between localization and delocalization within a spatial framework. Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger and Ernst Jünger's conceptual apparatuses are here employed to explain the complex dynamics of globalization and local rooting. In this perspective, geophilosophy is taken as a particular declination of environmental aesthetics to the extent that it questions the relationship of the subject with his/her lived experience of the territory. As Böhme's theory of atmospheres, also geophilosophy relies on the notion of landscape and refers to German Romanticism in opposing an aesthetic experience of nature to the technical and scientific appropriation of it. Geophilosophy is nevertheless interested in our living experience on Earth, not as a perceptive and atmospheric world, but as the space the citizen concretely lives and inhabits (Bonesio 2002).

5. All the paradigms of environmental aesthetics previously analyzed tend to reduce the aesthetic experience to one kind of experience or explanation, e.g. scientific knowledge, the perceptive experience or the identitary relationship with the territory. Another declination of environmental aesthetics has recently developed a different approach that understands aesthetic experience as autonomous and endowed of its own distinctive traits, notably as an experience that organizes the sensible to the aim of giving us pleasure and ascribing values. This kind of approach places in the centre the notion of landscape (D'Angelo 2010). Whereas both the atmospheric model and geophilosophy refer to the landscape as a physiognomic model that explains our aesthetic experience of nature, the most recent approach to landscape emphasizes the relational and imaginative aspects of this notion. To this aim, Emily Brady's "integrated aesthetic" (2003) gives a prominent role to the imaginative engagement, integrating it with typical components of the aesthetic response, such as the senses, emotions, disinterestedness, and a contemplative attitude. Landscape is thereby employed to explain our relationship with the environment in a fully aesthetic perspective, going beyond the opposition between nature and art or nature and history, thus retrieving traditional aesthetic categories, such as that of the sublime. The imaginative engagement in our aesthetic experience of nature defines then some kind of extension of our perception and gives another possible meaning to environmental aesthetics, one which finds in the notion of landscape a (re)new(ed) challenge (D'Angelo 2008).

ART AND AESTHETICS

Environmental aesthetics investigates some of the most traditional issues, such as the relationship between nature and art and the connection between aesthetics and ethics. Both these issues concern the definition of environmental aesthetics.

Even though environmental aesthetics is developed first of all as a rejection of the predominance of art appreciation in aesthetics, the focus on nature and on our experience of it does not exclude a comparison with the work of art. In this respect, though, environmental aesthetics includes totally opposite positions. Carlson, from the inside of a cognitivist paradigm, denounces the traditional tendency to treat natural

objects as if they were single pieces of art or to consider landscape as a scenery, modeled by landscape paintings. Carlson calls then to consider the very notion of environment as nature in which we are drenched and he describes the appreciation of nature as essentially different from what we experience in front of art. Whereas in the appreciation of art we are guided by the history of art, by our knowledge of the art world and by the awareness of the artist's action, in nature, Carlson maintains, in order to discern what can be the object of our appreciation, we need another kind of knowledge, notably that of science.

At variance with Carlson's cognitive approach, some of the most recent researches in environmental aesthetics, especially while reconsidering the notion of landscape, do not exclude the role of art from their accounts of environmental experience. Land Art and Environmental Art, with their historical and conceptual differences, are considered within this framework, as a theoretical interrogation of nature, that rewrites the relationship between art and nature in a completely non-mimetic manner. This kind of art establishes then a dialogue with environmental aesthetics to the extent that it places at the centre our experience of nature, our appreciation of it and our imaginative engagement with the natural environment.

In a definition of environmental aesthetics, at least a brief mention of its relationship with environmentalism is due. The connection between environmental aesthetics and ethics is more evident in those approaches, such as geophilosophy, which consider our concrete relationship with nature as the territory we live and inhabit. The cognitivist approach, while it sees some difficulties in the relationship between environmental aesthetics and environmentalism (Carlson 2010), assigns prominent roles to sciences such as geology, biology, and especially ecology, not only for the aesthetic appreciation of nature but also for environmental preservation practices. Other approaches, both the non-cognitivist and the atmospheric model, deal with an "ecological aesthetics" or "ecoaesthetics" in order to codify the relationship between environmental aesthetics and the preservation of the natural environment (Toadvine 2010).

In this direction, new avenues are constantly explored in environmental aesthetics, dealing with social and political theories, philosophy of biology, animalism, environmental policies and practices. All these approaches aim not only to theoretically develop environmental aesthetics further, but also to better understand the appreciation we may experience while living in our environment.

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