



Towards a New Aesthetics of Care

A Critical Reading of Nassauer's Cues to Care

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Abstract

Joan Nassauer's concept of cues to care has been influential within landscape design since her seminal essay *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames* was published in 1995 and her research is often used to justify the need for marking landscapes as owned, although there have been critical voices too. The enduring popularity of cues to care as a design method is due to how open it is to interpretation, and this thesis examines various landscape interventions that can be classed as cues to care, both explicitly and implicitly. Using Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be" approach as a guide I use a close reading and intertextual analysis to interrogate three of the assumptions in Nassauer's *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames*. After examining the meaning of "care" in cues to care, I problematise the assumptions behind the ideas in Nassauer's article by focusing on three assumptions. Firstly the idea that ecology is functional, secondly that ecology looks messy, and thirdly that nature is above all a cultural frame. I argue that these assumptions are revealing of particular attitudes to the more than human world and that they shape the scope, meaning and limits of cues to care as a strategy. Timothy Morton provides an alternative metaphysics and conception of aesthetics (based in object oriented ontology) that I think has much to offer landscape architecture and is used here to develop an alternative view of the role of the landscape design professional. In addition I examine his and De Block and Vicenzotti's new conceptions of the sublime to try to find a way of working that addresses and engages with the intimate strangeness of the more than human world while remaining critically apart from it. Following this analysis I suggest directions for an alternative cues to care that is more open to collaboration with, less keen to direct, the more than human world. I outline three types of cues to care that I believe can work within this paradigm, drawing from found objects and contemporary landscape design: Cues to care as a collaboration (with the human and more than human), cues to care as lens (drawing attention to strangeness in the landscape rather than marking as owned) and cues to care as veil (porous, shifting divisions rather than hard, fixed boundaries).

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Sammanfattning

Joan Nassauers koncept cues to care—kanske bäst översatt till ”tecken på omsorg” – har alltsedan dess introduktion, i och med publiceringen av hennes framstående essä *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames* (1995), haft stort inflytande på landskapsarkitektur, design, samt relaterad forskning och utbildning. Nassauer’s forskning om offentliga allmänna landskapspreferenser används fortfarande för att motivera behovet av att städa upp områden som uppfattas som röriga, och cues to care förser en lösningsstrategi som tillhör en tradition av minimalt ingrepp i landskapet. Den bestående populariteten för cues to care som designmetod beror på dess minimalism som lämnar uttrycket i sig öppet för en relativt bred tolkning utanför Nassauers ursprungliga mening. Syftet med denna avhandling är att utforska olika typer av cues to care och identifiera alternativa – mer autonoma och mindre styrande – förhållningssätt till strategin.

Cues to care, enligt Nassauers teori, är tecken på "mänsklig avsikt" i landskapet. De är ett sätt att markera ekologiskt funktionella landskap, som ibland uppfattas som stökiga, som värda att vårdas. Cues to care fungerar genom att förse den ekologiska funktionen med en kulturell ram. Denna kulturella ram tas från en av två väletablerade estetiska kategorier som Nassauer beskriver i *Cultural Sustainability: Aligning Aesthetics and Ecology from Placing Nature: Culture And Landscape Ecology* (1997): the scenic aesthetic (den bildsköna estetiken: vild, vacker natur) eller the aesthetic of care (omsorgens estetik: inhemsk, vardagligt attraktiv natur). Skapandet av ny estetik bedöms vara en gradvis process som följer snarare än driver allmänhetens medvetenhet och preferenser.

Med hjälp av Carol Bacchis tillvägagångssätt "What's the Problem Represented to be" som vägledning, utför jag en närläsning och intertextuell analys av Nassauers *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames*. I min analys identifierar jag några av Nassauers antaganden och talande tystnader, problematiserar dessa, samt diskuterar hur dessa antaganden påverkar strategin. Jag hävdar att dessa antaganden avslöjar särskilda attityder till den mer än mänskliga världen och att de formar omfattningen, innebörden och gränserna för cues to care som strategi.

Först undersöker jag tanken att ekologi är funktionell. En funktionell syn på ekologi är implicit antropocentrisk och kombineras i Nassauers estetiska teori med en distinktion mellan funktion och utseende som tillhör en korrelationistisk tradition. Idén om en funktionell ekologi uppmuntrar också en viss typ av pedagogiska cues to care som kan verka avtrubbande vad gäller upplevelsen av en plats. Mortons objektorienterade ontologi erbjuder en alternativ uppfattning där estetik är kausal snarare än dekorativ, vilket antyder en annan designstrategi. Dessutom betonar Morton att representationer inte är de saker de representerar, eller mer verkliga än de saker de representerar (som en funktionell pedagogisk ekologi ibland kan antyda), utan snarare nya objekt i sig.

Det andra antagandet är att ekologi ser rörig ut. Care (omsorg) har många betydelser. En närläsning av Nassauers artiklar avslöjar en normativt ordnande

betydelse av care. Genom att jämföra Nassauers konceptuella modell med broken windows teori utforskar jag rädslan för katastrofer när ordningen störs. Harcourts kritik av broken windows antyder också hur skapandet av ordning återinskriver behovet av ordning, det vill säga att användningen av ordningens estetik förstärker sin acceptans. Genom att använda Douglas Renhet och fara visar jag hur omdömen av attityder gentemot den råa naturens stökighet beror på hur dessa egenskaper ligger utanför den konceptuella ramen av newtonsk mekanik och funktionella ekosystem.

Det tredje antagandet är att naturen framför allt är kulturell. Nassauers scenic aesthetic bygger på traditioner från det pittoreska men är inte klart definierad. Jag hävdar att det är mest användbart att läsa hennes syn på the scenic aesthetic som en slags vildmark, och jämföra hennes läsning med Cronon's. Nassauers syn, där naturen uppfattas som ett kulturellt fenomen, raderar all autonomi från vildmarkskonceptet, hur bristfällig det än är. Jag letar istället i Mortons, och De Blocks och Vicenzottis nyare uppfattningar idéer om det sublimala för att försöka hitta en inriktning som kvarhåller den mer-än-mänskliga världens autonomi och egenvärde, samtidigt som den upprätthåller ett kritiskt avstånd.

Efter denna analys föreslår jag riktningar för en alternativ bild av care som är mer öppen för samarbete med – och mindre angelägen om att styra – den mer-än-mänskliga världen. Jag skissar fram tre typer av cues to care som jag tror kan fungera inom detta paradigm, utifrån hittade föremål och samtida landskapsdesign.

Cues to care som samarbete (mellan människan och annat-än-människan) handlar om att hitta sätt att möjliggöra autonomi och samarbete nere på fältet snarare än i den abstrakta världen av ekosystemmodeller. Jag hämtar inspiration från EMF:s Girona's Shores-projekt där en storskalig landskapsvårdsplan härrör från (istället för att styra) omfattande underhåll i landskapet av olika aktörer. Planen är framtagen i ett samarbete mellan landskapsarkitekter, landskapsvårdare och själva landskapet och föreslår en typ av landskapsdesign som handlar om bygger på autonomi, kompromisser och engagemang och som sätter spår av inkorporerar detta samarbete i utformningen – en indikation för interaktion snarare än tecken på ägande.

Cues to care som (teoretisk) lins föreslår ett sätt som cues to care medvetet kan dra uppmärksamheten till detaljerna och det udda i den mer-än-mänskliga världen. Linsar kan fungera som inbjudningar till samarbete, som på Natur-park Südgeländes graffittivägg. Alternativt kan de, inspirerade av Mortons objektorienterade ontologi, vara sätt att uppmärksamma och interagera med objekten runt omkring oss. Jag använder exempel på hittade föremål.

Cues to care som slöja är inspirerad av de nya idéerna om sublimitet i Morton och i De Block och Vicenzotti. När jag upptäcker att de upphöjda stigarna och detaljerna i Natur-park Südgelände upprepade både landskapsparker och vildmarkstropen, föreslår jag ledtrådar till omsorg cues to care som något som skapar distans, som gör det märkliga och outgrundliga påtagligt. Gilles Clements Derborence ö vid Henri Matisse-parken i Lille är ett exempel på hur uteslutning av besökare utan insyn kan se ut. Kanske än mer lovande är den tillfälliga ängen för sånglärkor vid Tempelhoffältet, Berlin. Den är ett exempel på hur en cue to care kan vara en tillfällig uteslutning: poröst och skiftande snarare än att skapa hårda, fasta gränser. Gilles Clements le jardin en mouvement (trädgård i rörelse) är ett annat exempel på detta – liksom stigarna i Girona.

Som en ytterligare diskussion, en kritiskt närmare läsning av Marcia Muelder Eaton (som hade inflytande på Nassauers syn på landskap och språk) leder till argumentationen att landskapsarkitektur, som alla konst, kan sammansmälta halvformade, ofullständiga världsbilder istället för att vänta in deras artikulering i den bredare kulturen. Dessutom illustrerar Eatons beskrivning av den vilda landskapsestetiken varför en rörig estetik är otillräcklig i sig för att hantera frågor om dominans och mer-än-mänsklig autonomi i landskapsarkitektur.

Avslutningsvis ställs frågor om landskapsarkitekturens ansvar för den mer-än-mänskliga världen och dess förmåga att förändra människors förutfattade meningar om landskap. Kanske är det möjligt med en landskapsarkitekturestetik som är svagare; som påtvingar mindre ordning; och som inte omformar mer än nödvändigt.

Introduction

I forget exactly when I first read Professor Joan Nassauer's seminal article *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames* (Nassauer 1995) during my landscape architecture degree but I do remember clearly how struck I was by it. Twenty years after the article was written, her central strategy of cues to care still seemed fresh and unique: a strategy that gave value to parts of a landscape that would otherwise be ignored, avoided, or built on through simple acts of marking. But the more I read and saw, the more I began to question some of the underlying assumptions in Nassauer's theory of aesthetics that underlie why cues to care are necessary and how they should work. The thinking that seems problematic, contradictory, that works against the intended aims of Nassauer's strategy (to encourage or preserve biodiverse ecosystems), is not limited to Nassauer either: I think it is illustrative of a wider contradiction within landscape architecture, that is still current in the discipline, and this seemed worth spending time investigating.

Nassauer's cues to care strategy is part of a tradition in both architecture and landscape design that stresses the importance of deliberate but minimal intervention in a site e.g. (Lassus 1994; Chemetoff 2009; Burckhardt 2022), and part of the attraction of her concept, I believe, is its openness to interpretation by different practitioners due to its simplicity and open-endedness. Taken just as a phrase in itself, it combines a sense of responsibility to a site; a considerate, engaged public and a soft-touch directing of attention but the specific meaning is hazy. For example, who cues or is cued to care? And what does care mean in this context? It is this openness that makes it attractive, but it also makes it ambiguous.

Nassauer's twin concepts of cues to care and orderly frames have continued to be influential within landscape architecture, both in education—where *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames* (1995) is still taught—and among award winning, influential landscape designers (Franch 2018; Dunnett 2019). Within academic research her terms are still used as a shorthand for the perceived need to mark landscapes with signs of human care and order e.g. (Hoyle et al. 2017; Ignatieva 2017; Kowarik 2018), and while her strategy is intended as a tool to safeguard biodiversity in existing ecologies or novel designs, her research is also often used as evidence that people perceive spontaneous vegetation to be messy and undesirable e.g. (Hoyle et al. 2017; Kowarik 2018; Colley et al. 2022; Lis et al. 2022). An article by ecologist, Mark Hostetler (2021) questioned the wisdom of applying Nassauer's studies of landscape preferences in suburban Detroit (1995) to a wider context, arguing that her studies could well reflect neighbourhood norms instead of generally applicable findings. Nassauer responded, beginning a short correspondence of articles between the pair, and prompting Hostetler to lay out his original motivation to dig into cues to care as a body of research—the reflexively conservative way that he'd repeatedly seen the strategy used:

As an urban ecologist, I have worked with a number of landscape architects on alternative landscapes, and I heard from them this theory of CTC and they often

proposed how much “cues” were needed to make a landscaping design acceptable to homeowners. Often, cues suggested were such things as “50%” of the yard needs to be mowed.” (Hostetler 2022:561)

Hostetler argued that while he believed that cues to care (CTC) could be a useful way to convince the public to adopt “alternative, sustainable landscapes,” he also urged caution in “how we measure the types and amount of cues ‘needed’ to create more ecological landscapes” (Hostetler 2022:562). I agree and I think Hostetler’s belief that cues to care are often used as a brake on the creation of biodiverse landscapes is worth investigating by examining the conceptions of care and of order that are central to Nassauer’s theory. It is these conceptions in Nassauer’s articles that provide the subject of this thesis.

My focus in this thesis, therefore, is on the assumptions that underly Joan Nassauer’s writings on aesthetics, that shape and justify her vision of cues to care. By interrogating her assumptions and then looking for alternative ways of seeing, I can try to point towards an alternative cues to care that is perhaps less focused on orderliness as an end in itself. This thesis is absolutely not intended as an ad-hominem attack on Professor Nassauer. I have chosen her strategy of cues to care because it’s open ended and offers multiple interpretations, and I have chosen to examine her writing because I believe that it illustrates worldviews and biases shared explicitly or implicitly by many other practitioners and policy makers. In a time of multiple existential crises such as climate change and biodiversity loss, while it’s essential that we, as a profession, act to address them, it is also important that how we act doesn’t just repeat the same way of thinking that has lead us to this point. Are there other ways of conceptualising of and working with the more than human world that can benefit and reshape our profession? The openness of the term cues to care has allowed it to be interpreted by other landscape architects in ways that don’t necessarily align with Nassauer’s original intentions but that do provide new possibilities for an aesthetics of care. I will explore some of these later in the thesis, and make a start on providing a theoretical ground for some of these approaches, indicating an alternative jumping off point.

Main Question for Thesis

This thesis attempts to investigate one central question:

- What are some of the underlying assumptions in Nassauer’s writing and what are their implications for how landscape designers approach the more than human world?

Once I have investigated this question, I will attempt to sketch directions for an alternative aesthetic of care based on alternative assumptions.

Method

I will be drawing on theories from within and outside of landscape architecture. However, the overall framework for the thesis which has led to my focus on Nassauer’s assumptions is structured around a close reading of Nassauer’s articles combined with Carol Bacchi’s “What’s the Problem Represented to be” approach,

or WPR approach (2012). Originally developed to analyse public policy, a WPR approach provides a useful tool for the kind of analysis this thesis will attempt since it takes a step back to focus on and critique the assumptions that form the problem in question—the problem of messy ecosystems, for example—rather than on the “problem” itself. In this case, rather than find new ways to frame messy nature, I want to investigate the assumptions behind the idea that nature *is* messy. WPR also advocates focusing on the silences in the problem representation and how the formulation of the problem has consequences, in this case consequences for design (Bacchi 2012). A close reading will necessitate burrowing into the detail of *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames* to examine the language Nassauer uses and the construction of her arguments. It will also require an intertextual approach that uses Nassauer’s other writings, allied authors and opposing viewpoints to analyse interpret and understand the conceptual framework of the text in question. Reconstructing Nassauer’s ideas and revealing the structure of her assumptions is a step towards outlining the consequences of this thinking.

In order to keep the scope of the thesis manageable I have limited my analysis not just to Joan Nassauer, but also only to her earlier publications, where I believe she lays out most clearly the ideas that inspired cues to care and it’s accompanying aesthetics. I have therefore not referenced any of her many publications after 1997. I have also tried to limit the other theorists I have brought in to critique Nassauer’s worldview and inspire an alternative cues to care. A large part (but not all) of the alternative views of aesthetics and ecology is provided by Timothy Morton’s writing. I believe that Morton’s metaphysics, are particularly useful for examining Nassauer’s assumptions about ecology and nature since they are a serious attempt to hook the contradictions and rethink the metaphysics of approaches to the more than human world.

Finally, I have tried to show how an alternative approach to cues to care could look, based on these revised assumptions, with a handful of existing European landscape projects. Cues to care has already become a genre of its own within landscape architecture, understood and used in different ways, often with different assumptions behind it. This thesis is an attempt to show that they are not all the same and why some may be more helpful than others.

Nassauer’s Cues to Care

This summary is based on the seminal article *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames* (1995) but also draws on Nassauer’s chapter *Cultural Sustainability: Aligning Aesthetics and Ecology* in *Placing Nature: Culture And Landscape Ecology* (1997) (which she also edited). *Cultural Sustainability* further develops and formalizes the aesthetic theory of *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames*. I don’t have space to examine all of Nassauer’s arguments or concepts here, but I have included all those which are key to my argument and which I will take up in later sections of this thesis.

The terms *orderly frames* and *cues to care* definitely overlap even if they are not synonymous. A *cue to care* is a way of putting nature in a cultural frame; an *orderly frame* is a type of *cue to care*. In this thesis I have used the term *cue to care* throughout, although the idea of *orderliness* is central to Nassauer’s thought. In Nassauer’s articles, a *cue to care* is a mark of “human intention” in the landscape

(Nassauer 1995:162), an “expression... of neatness and tended nature” (1995:162). And it is this combination of neatness, ownership and intention that I will focus on. Cues to care are used to mark ecosystems “so that people will recognize their beauty and maintain it appropriately”(1995:162). And they are necessary because, Nassauer argues, what we consider to be nature is actually just a cultural construct, comprising the “pictorial conventions of the picturesque” (1995:161). These pictorial conventions create strong cultural expectations for what an attractive landscape should look like, and this is why landscapes with “ecological quality” (ibid.) are largely perceived as messy—they don’t fit within this cultural framing. This perceived disconnect between a landscape’s function and its appearance lies at the heart of Nassauer’s aesthetic and subsequent design strategy. Since “ecological function tends to look messy” (1995:161) and cultural expectations of what nature should look like are so strong, the landscape architect is faced with a problem of “translation”: presenting “the scientific concept of ecology” in the language of the “cultural concept of nature” (ibid.). Or, to use another of Nassauer’s metaphors: “placing unfamiliar and frequently undesirable forms inside familiar, attractive packages. ... designing orderly frames for messy ecosystems.” (ibid.). The result, she argues, is landscapes that are both ecologically valuable and culturally attractive.

Nassauer rejects the idea of trying to create a new ecological aesthetic outright (as argued for by Howett (1987) amongst others) since she believes, along with Eaton (1990), that the conventions of landscape preference are simply too culturally entrenched and slow to change. Instead she believes that by using cues to care, landscapes with a high ecological quality can gradually enter vernacular culture (1995:163). Nassauer refers to ecological quality and ecological function throughout this article without ever offering a definition, although they are connected implicitly to “greater biodiversity and heterogeneity” (1995:163).

In “Cultural Sustainability: Aligning Aesthetics and Ecology” (1997), Nassauer develops these ideas further by identifying two landscape aesthetics to use within her conceptual framing. These aesthetics are chosen because she considers them to be *culturally sustainable*; attractive landscape types that are “culturally ingrained ... conceptually well developed ... (and) resistant to change” (1997:68). The aesthetics she formulates are: the *scenic aesthetic* and the *aesthetic of care* both of which, although not necessarily ecologically healthy in themselves, she considers to be useful archetypes for landscape practitioners to graft ecological health on to. The scenic aesthetic, according to Nassauer’s definition, is a picturesque-derived imaginary of “Rocky peaks, steep bluffs, crashing water, gnarled trees and the ruins of ancient buildings” (ibid.) In landscapes that fit within the scenic aesthetic, cues to care are marked by what isn’t visible: “the absence of trash or signs of human occupation” (ibid.). The aesthetic of care, by contrast, aligns with settled landscapes that are improved with positive signs of human intention—most often shown by neatness. It is conceived of as an aesthetic based on shared values and demonstrative virtue: “... laden with good intentions and social meaning: stewardship, a work ethic, personal pride, contributing to community.” (ibid.). The importance of providing cultural cues to care is again underlined by warning about the reduced chances of survival for unmarked (and therefore unadmired) landscapes:

Landscapes that attract the admiring attention of human beings are more likely to survive than landscapes that do not attract care or admiration. ... People will be less likely to redevelop, pave, mine or “improve” landscapes that they recognise as attractive.” (ibid.)

I have selected three assumptions, both implicit and explicit, that may allow us to open up the worldview behind Nassauer’s arguments. The first, Ecology is Functional, is derived from the linking of ecology and function in the texts and looks at both the traditions of regarding more than human life as mechanical and for human use, the implications of such thinking, and Timothy Morton’s alternative to it. The second, Ecology Looks Messy, examines Nassauer’s aesthetic of care and the ideas of mess, order and control within it. The third, Nature is Culture, explores the consequences of reading nature as a purely cultural phenomena and looks at some recent reworkings of the sublime for ways to reach beyond the human world. The analysis of these assumptions is then used to tentatively suggest directions an alternative cues to care with more space, conceptually and physically, for the more than human world.

Investigating Nassauer’s Assumptions

Assumption i: Ecology is Functional

As I’ve outlined above, Nassauer’s cues to care is a pragmatic attempt to bridge (or mask) the gap between human perception and more than human complexity.

Appearance (and Nassauer’s use of the term aesthetic does seem to be focused on appearance rather than the other senses), the limits of what people can perceive, is set against function, what’s actually going on. This functionality is presented as a good, as something worth preserving. In this strategy, the designer’s role is to give what is good but hard or impossible to perceive (ecological function) an attractive appearance. By creating this hard distinction between “ecological function and natural appearance,” (1995:163) Nassauer creates a world where goodness is invisible and only the unreliable, deceptive appearance remains. This good ecology (ecological quality, ecological value), in Nassauer’s reading—but not just Nassauer’s reading—needs to be provided with a visual marking because it is more or less invisible: a cue to care. I would argue that although this strategy is ostensibly one that aims to preserve more than human complexity, it is actually based on a reluctance to engage with the more than human world as anything more than a functional mechanism, ticking happily away under the surface of a culturally determined appearance. From this point of view, ecology is mechanistic and anthropocentric, a machine that functions by producing a human-focused outcomes such as clean water or pollination. Without the assumption of these outcomes, the idea of ecological functionality in itself makes no sense. This attitude, I would argue, is still the mainstream view in landscape architecture. For example, a popular introductory guide to ecological landscape design for students and

interested laymen (Rottle and Yocom 2010) describes ecological design in terms of “healthy, regenerative systems” that provide “components of our built environments,” that “can be integrated into the fabric of our communities” and serve “as a new kind of infrastructure.” (Rottle & Yocom 2010:13). This description leans heavily into a kind of utopian cyborg-ism where ecological design provides a vital, life-giving function when grafted onto human communities.

Correlationism, and Appearance vs Function

According to Timothy Morton, professor and Rita Shea Guffey Chair in English at Rice University, the ideas of functional ecology and the separation of appearance and function described above, are closely linked traditions. The separation of matter and appearance is intrinsic to a correlationist tradition of thought where all more than human beings are viewed exclusively through the lens of human relationships and use value (Morton 2012a). He traces this logic back to the beginnings of agriculture (Morton 2012b), but this is also the myth of Genesis in the Christian tradition and the basis of the conception of ecosystem services (although anachronistic in 1995), so it has a very long and still active tail. This anthropocentric view is the basis, of much standard scientific—but also popular—conceptions of the world that are framed in terms of human use. Matter, for example:

Matter is always matter-for. If you use the term matter, you’ve already reduced a unique object to “raw materials-for” something-or-other. I light a match. The match is made of matter? No, it’s made of wood from a tree. The tree is made of matter? No, it’s made of cells. The cells? And so on down to electrons. The electrons are made of matter? No, they’re made of ... and so on. Thinking “matter” is thinking with blinkers on. It suits correlationism. (Morton 2013:61)

This view of the world as composed of matter has two consequences, according to Morton, that are relevant here. The first is that by assuming that the world is made of interchangeable stuff, that things (a tree, a wood, a river valley) can be grubbed up, transformed and remade in a way which is careless of the destruction of existing complexity, existing uniqueness, and the second is its aesthetic consequences. Since, from this correlationist point of view, the world is made up of a grey mechanistic matter, aesthetics are merely decorative, an illusion or a frippery painted on lumps of matter in Newtonian space. This analysis is useful if we compare it with the worldview in *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames*. I would argue that the division that Morton notes between matter and aesthetics is mirrored in Nassauer’s division between a landscapes “function” (scientific, ecological) and its malleable “appearance” (cultural, conceptual) (Nassauer 1995:161); in other words, the messy ecosystem and the (potentially) orderly frame. This view of ecology has consequences for design. For example, a strategy that is often adopted when using cues to care, is to try to make an underlying ecology visible through design interventions. This is an approach that Nassauer herself dismisses, claiming that the work of designers is *not* “an artistic problem of expressing ecological function” (1995:161). However it is an approach that is a understandable consequence of this worldview that sees ecology as real but invisible and appearance as visible but superficial. This idea, that design’s key function in landscape architecture is to explain ecology or make it visible, can counterintuitively erect a barrier to the experiencing of a site. Where the designer

assumes, consciously or otherwise, that their role is to communicate the inner workings of a functional ecology, invisible to the general public and bubbling away just out of sight, we end up with marked contour lines, bird houses and information signs with pictures of local species with their scientific names. Below is an example from Årtsabergsparken in Stockholm (figure 1).



Figure 1: Playful ersatz footprints of wading birds to illustrate the underlying ecology of the park. Photo author's own, 2020.



Figure 2: A sign to explain the local ecology to passers by on the Fjärilstigen (Butterfly path), Uppsala. Photo author's own, 2022.

Here, the playful design interventions act as labels for the visitor to read: there are birds here, using this water. The cues to care function both as labels for park users and as the imposing of a particular view, a particular aesthetic, of the more than human world. Another even more literal form of this kind of cues to care is found in nature reserves where signs are erected that list locally found species as a way of communicating the functional ecological value of a site. Figure 2 shows an

example of this from Uppsala. The problem with these two linked approaches is that they devalue what the visitor directly experiences and stress a particular genre of ecological language. The sign's pedagogical message risks getting in the way of an experiential encounter. It attempts to communicate a truth that the visitor is not capable of gaining from the site herself but only mediated.

Object Oriented Ontology

Morton's version of object oriented ontology (ooo) offers an alternative worldview to the separation of aesthetics and function which I believe can be helpful when considering how cues to care could work. He challenges the idea of matter and Newtonian space, arguing that

Quantum theory ... tell us that there's no such thing as a transparent empty space like that, no such thing as a substance that underlies everything like bland clay that then gets decorated with the candy sprinkles of accidentality. (*Timothy Morton: Synthesizers* 2019)

And he goes on to paint an uncanny vision of what replaces it:

No in-between non-things that separate me and this tree, me and the window, subject and object. It's all landscape and its much much more than that. It's not a painting you're looking at through a screen, or a thing in a shop separated from you by a huge plate of glass, like it's in a totally different dimension. It's all atmosphere, lighting –surrounding, enveloping, interpenetrating, coming through the artificial boundary with a specific frequency and amplitude, like the yellow light pouring through the cat door, in a picture called 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind'." (ibid.)

But if aesthetics aren't just candy coloured sprinkles on the "bland clay" of raw material, what are they? (Morton 2013:96) They are causality itself! For Morton, objects are the essential generative component of the world: forming space-time, interacting with and getting entangled each others' tricksterish appearances while always maintaining an absolutely withdrawn essence. And the aesthetic interactions between objects becomes the glue or motor of the universe:

... causality is wholly an aesthetic phenomenon. Aesthetic events are not limited to interactions between humans or between humans and painted canvases or between humans and sentences in dramas. They happen when a saw bites into a fresh piece of plywood. They happen when a worm oozes out of some wet soil. They happen when a massive object emits gravity waves. When you make or study art you are not exploring some kind of candy on the surface of a machine. You are making or studying causality. The aesthetic dimension is the causal dimension. (Morton 2013:19–21)

This is the most exciting part of Morton's object oriented ontology from a design point of view, design is no longer playing with a superficial surface but engaging with the causal glue of the real. It encourages us to pay more attention to the aesthetic, to discrete objects in themselves and the relationships between them—to the visceral. When we create a new object, insert a cues to care, we are creating a whole new set of vibrant relationships which are the properties of those objects. Cues to care are not therefore labels of a more "real" reality—whether an underlying "ecology" or an overarching "cultural" landscape labelling; They are new objects placed among objects, irradiating and transforming each other with their aesthetic fields.

Representation

A further, related idea of Morton's that's relevant here is how his theory extends to the representation of objects. As part of demonstrating the irreducibility of the object as the basis of his theory, the impossibility of any kind of frame (such as matter) that would be somehow more real, more intrinsic, Morton describes a breeze block:

Think of a cinder block—the more gray and mundane the better. ... A butterfly alights on the block. She has a butterfly's eye view of it as her wings brush its stubbly exterior. I feel along the sharp sandy surface of the cinder block. My hands encounter hand-style impressions of the block, testing their slightly careworn softness against the rough texture. An architect makes an exploded view of a cross section of the block. But a cross section of a cinder block is not a cinder block. A finger's impression of a cinder block is not a cinder block. A butterfly's touch on a cinder block is not a cinder block. (Morton 2013:50)

He goes on in the same vein. But the key point for my argument is how within Morton's object oriented ontological view a representation of an object is definitively not the object itself, nor is not a truer version of the object or an assisted visualising of the object. The representation is, in itself, a new object, given internally just like the breeze block is between its appearance and its essence.

Morton's metaphysics offer an approach to landscape design that can sidestep the attempted revealing of ecological truth. Rather than considering cues to care as attractive markers to preserve an underlying but invisible ecology, they become objects interacting with a sea of other objects which consist of all the many things that we previously considered to be ecology. If we dismiss functional ecology as a correlationist framing then ecology itself or rather the more than human world becomes more opaque and strange, more open ended in its complexity, at the same time as its vitality and autonomy become visible.

Assumption ii: Ecology Looks Messy

Ecological quality tends to look messy, and this poses problems for those who imagine and construct new landscapes to enhance ecological quality. (Nassauer 1995:161)

As the above quote illustrates, Nassauer believes that landscapes with "ecological quality" look messy, and that this messiness makes them unattractive, difficult to preserve. In this section I will examine Nassauer's category of the aesthetics of care in order to understand the conceptualisation of "messy" ecology. Following on from this I will examine the idea of "messy" from a wider perspective by looking into theories of categorisation and disorder both within sociology and anthropology. Finally I will briefly examine alternate ways of using cues to care than one of order imposed on disorder.

What is Care?

Before we problematise Nassauer's aesthetics of care, we need to try and separate it out into its constitutive strands. The aesthetic of care is the display of care, of maintenance, in the inhabited landscape:

We find our local landscapes beautiful, and change and maintain them to display a different and equally compelling aesthetic, that of care. (Nassauer 1988:974)

So how do we “display” care? According to Nassauer, by neatness. Neatness is synonymous with this aesthetic of care and the aesthetic that Nassauer develops here and later is one that is unambiguously neat and clean:

Fields of row crops in the Midwest, suburban lawns, and urban streets dotted with window boxes and planters all typify this aesthetic of care: neat, green, trimmed, straight, evenly mowed, painted and clean, and colourful flowers displayed.
(Nassauer 1997:75)

It is also ordered: “In the everyday landscape of North America, the recognizable system of form typically is characterized by neatness and order”(Nassauer 1995:163). These qualities of neatness, orderliness and cleanliness are defined against the explicit messiness (with its implied disorder and dirt) of the unbeautified natural world.

Nassauer’s aesthetic of care inspired by suburbia and Midwestern farmers has its roots in the 17 and 18th century idea of improvement. Importantly, the idea of agricultural improvement was not just a moral imperative but also inspired an aesthetic appreciation among its enactors and supporters. As Keith Thomas writes in his study of attitudes to the natural world in early modern England, “To (the supporters of improvement) ... a tamed, inhabited and productive landscape was beautiful” (1984:255). This moral imperative to improve the productive capacity of the land that is strongly coupled to an orderly aesthetic, is strong in Nassauer’s aesthetics of care. We can hear the echo of the Earl of Clarendon in the eighteenth century who wrote that God “had committed the earth to man to be by him cultivated and polished”, and “wild and vacant lands” were “like a deformed chaos” (ibid.). Order is beauty and beauty is order. To illustrate the importance of neatness as both an attractive quality and to demonstrate care, Nassauer gives an iconic example from Midwestern agrarian agriculture:

What could possibly make a flat Illinois cornfield without fencerow or farmstead or distant grove beautiful? Farmers see beauty in the straightness of the rows, uninterrupted by weeds or water, their even green color, and the neatly mown roadside that surrounds the field These characteristics constitute a recognizable image of care so powerful that it is a stereotype (Nassauer 1995:163–5)

So this is the imaginary the reader is asked to consider as an image of care. But in an earlier article Nassauer and Westmacott (1987) push back against the idea that the ordering-for-its-own -sake of a farmed landscape is what makes it attractive to the farmers. Rather it is its functionality:

Farmers see beauty in rural landscapes that is rooted in their understanding of the land’s function, the fit between its economically productive use and its suitability. Landscapes suitable to be cropland, by virtue of their soil, slope and locational characteristics, are beautiful when they fulfil their purpose well. In the midwest this is exemplified when rows are straight and even, when the field is large and flat and uninterrupted ... The ugly landscape is one that is used in a way that contradicts its suitability. (Nassauer & Westmacott 1987:202)

Landscape aesthetics, from this point of view, is tied to a correlationist “purpose,” and a beautiful landscape is one that fulfils its purpose best. In the previous section I argued that functional ecology is understood as providing a kind of invisible but more real landscape under the surface gloss of the visible. Here we see the ordering

of a landscape as revelation of its underlying truth: the fine-tuning of the particular correlationist functionality of a specific place.

But there is much more to the aesthetic Nassauer describes than functionality. More than an expression of functionality. Care for Nassauer is an act of social communication that signals both ownership and “social identity.” (Nassauer 1997:75). In fact, Nassauer’s aesthetic of care is very much a group project, focused on virtuous action to avoid censure between members of a community: “We maintain landscapes to draw approving attention and to avoid the disapprobation of our community” (Nassauer 1997:75). In addition, this caring is a constant process of attention and intervention:

Care is attentive to change. It means watching over something that changes. It means watching over a place and intervening in change to achieve a proper landscape. (Nassauer 1997:75)

As the use of “proper landscape” here suggests, this aesthetic of care it is a deeply normative one, that marks landscapes in socially acceptable ways in order to project the idea of a harmonious community, since “the landscapes of city dwellers’ homes, neighborhoods, parks, roadsides, and businesses are public portraits of themselves.” (Nassauer 1995:162)

So care is about neatness and order. It is sometimes about revealing an underlying functionality, as long as that functionality can be displayed with neatness and order. It is about marking ecologies as occupied or owned. It is about accommodating the aspects of ecology that don’t threaten us and disciplining those that do. It is, therefore, about the display of control. The aesthetic of care is about disguising the mess of messy ecosystems. And by calling something messy, the need for imposed order is implied. How this order is to be manifested is not really specified, it is what *looks* good (Nassauer 1995:161), it’s what the community values. I would argue that it springs from the assumptions I outlined in the previous section: of a correlationist, functional nature. From this point of view, nature needs to be mediated through cues to care in order to make it appear as “proper” nature: orderly and functional. There is, I think, a tension here between the view that the natural world must be kept visibly ordered under the aesthetic of care, and the belief that natural ecosystems are both important and good in themselves (ibid.). Nassauer believes that landscape architects have no choice but to follow the “law-like aesthetic conventions” (1997:68) of care (or the scenic, see next section) since these conventions are anchored in public discourse and change only very slowly. This means that it she is left with a central dilemma which cues to care is an attempt to solve: how to disguise ecology (which is good) in the language of cultural conventions (which is unavoidable).

Broken Windows, and Mess as Danger

Let’s look at what happens in Nassauer’s account if ecology is not given marks of order and ownership:

A landscape that does not show signs of care may be perceived as abandoned and messy. A place that looks abandoned is vulnerable to development or misguided improvement ... A place that looks messy is usually cleaned up so thoroughly that biodiversity is virtually eliminated (Nassauer 1997:75)

So when ecology looks messy, it becomes vulnerable and its core quality (biodiversity) is eliminated. But by whom? There’s something interesting going on

here. Nassauer is struggling with this tension—she believes that ecology (biodiversity, complex interacting non-human life) is good, even essential, but at the same time she also believes that it looks messy, dirty and therefore must be policed. Cues to care is a way of trying to square this unavoidable circle, to stay with the trouble. But I think there is more to investigate here; the “cleaned up” in the above quote is strangely passive. Who cleans up and eliminates the biodiversity? How? I believe an examination of broken windows theory can provide some answers.

Broken windows theory was the premise behind an influential order-maintenance policing strategy in New York City and elsewhere in the 1990s (Harcourt 1998). It’s named after an article in the Atlantic magazine: Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety by George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson (1982). The article explicitly links crime and disorder and argues that the policing of disorder reduces crime. According to Wilson and Kelling, disorder leads to a fear of crime, and fear of crime leads to a rise in crime. They claim that “at the community level, disorder and crime are usually inextricably linked, in a kind of developmental sequence.” (ibid.:3) where disorder, if left unchecked, can lead to an explosion in crime. When rereading *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames*, I was struck by its similarity to broken windows theory, and I’m not the only. Paul H. Gobster, who has co-authored, with Nassauer, wrote approvingly that

Conceptually, Nassauer’s visual assessment-based cues to care framework ... has been likened to the inverse of Wilson and Kelling’s (1982) broken windows theory ... in that the former deals with expressions of beauty, stewardship, and human presence, while the latter deals with blight, disorder, and abandonment. (Gobster et al. 2020:2)

And I agree, although I think cues to care is more a different focus than an inverted theory—they are essentially the same theory with the same view of society, it’s just that broken windows theorises what happens when there are insufficient cues to care. I will quote a passage from Wilson and Keller’s article in full to try to show the parallels with Nassauer’s cues to care (emphasis my own):

We suggest that "untended" behaviour also leads to the breakdown of community controls. A stable neighborhood of families who care for their homes, mind each other's children, and confidently frown on unwanted intruders can change, in a few years or even a few months, to an inhospitable and frightening jungle. A piece of property is abandoned, weeds grow up, a window is smashed. Adults stop scolding rowdy children; the children, emboldened, become more rowdy. Families move out, unattached adults move in. Teenagers gather in front of the corner store. The merchant asks them to move; they refuse. Fights occur. Litter accumulates. People start drinking in front of the grocery; in time, an inebriate slumps to the sidewalk and is allowed to sleep it off. Pedestrians are approached by panhandlers. At this point it is not inevitable that serious crime will flourish or violent attacks on strangers will occur. But many residents will think that crime, especially violent crime, is on the rise, and they will modify their behaviour accordingly. ... Such an area is vulnerable to criminal invasion. (Wilson & Kelling 1982:4)

Note how both the natural world (“weeds”, a “jungle”) and rootless human strangers (“Teenagers”, “unattached adults”) become a synchronised, almost supernatural invading force that breaks down stable neighbourhoods, prevents effective parenting, and forces families to move leaving, finally, a shattered neighbourhood vulnerable to a final “criminal invasion.” The danger comes most

from both outside the community—nameless, faceless, but also from inside, from the untended lawns and the unscolded children. Without tending, without scolding, control is lost and the barbarians take over. The danger here is also in things that move autonomously outside the rules of this community: the unattached and rootless, panhandlers or weeds. If we examine Nassauer’s writing we can find traces of this view. It explains the shadowy catastrophe in *Messy Ecosystems*, *Orderly Frames* that happens off screen, irrevocably and unavoidably when a “place that looks messy is usually cleaned up so thoroughly that biodiversity is virtually eliminated” (Nassauer 1997:75)

Academic criticism of broken windows and the policing it inspired (so-called order-maintenance policing and quality of life initiatives) was beginning to emerge by the late ‘90s. In his critique, Harcourt (1998) questions the underlying Durkheimian conception of deterrence in broken windows theory: that policing reduces crime by influencing individual behaviour (either through increasing fear of punishment or reducing fear of crime) thereby protecting community norms. Instead, wonders Harcourt (via Foucault) if the imposition of a particular order via order-maintenance policing is not just a way of upholding community norms but of *creating* community norms.

But what if order-maintenance policing, instead of merely influencing these categories of individuals, actually helps shape or create these categories? What if the order itself - the order privileged by order-maintenance policing - not only upholds the community norms that result in greater moral cohesion and lower crime rates, but instead creates those community norms? What if the order imposes norms on the community? (Harcourt 1998:353)

In the same way that norms of correct behaviour are created and recreated through the aesthetic results of order-maintenance policing, the controlling of a messy ecology through weeding, pruning and mowing is not only a way for the community to repeatedly define itself against a disorderly other, but these actions re-create and re-affirm that binary and that disorderly other. In other words, the law-like landscape preferences that Nassauer uses to justify her aesthetics are in fact reinforced by the act of forming the landscape after these ordered aesthetics. If we accept this argument, aesthetic conventions are not law-like, they are more open, more changeable. They are an iterative process that forms what is acceptable in the landscape each time they are used to form a landscape, they are even the act of a community forming an image of itself and its norms. This makes these conventions contingent, rewritable, and an active part of the construction of norms, preferences and community identity. Other worldviews, other forms of policing the boundaries would create other norms.

Assuming that the ordering of messy ecosystems is not inevitable due to iron public preferences, could it still be beneficial? Nassauer argues that cues to care is a way to preserve the underlying messiness of ecosystems in the face of popular disapproval. But I believe that, as well as actively reinforcing this disapproval it also sets a limit on the amount of messy ecosystems permitted on a site, which seems to fit with Mark Hostetler’s anecdotal observations as an urban ecologist mentioned in the introduction (2022). The attempt to force apparent order on nature has often unintended consequences. Ecologist Robert Dunn, for example, details how our human attempts to control weeds, pests or diseases with blanket exterminations have created bacterial immunity or catastrophic agricultural

consequences (2021). On a more local scale George Monbiot describes the severe urban floods that follow the straightening, deforesting and dredging of upland streams in Wales (2014). The attempt to order, even when it doesn't have catastrophic outcomes still damages. The simplifying of ecosystems in much landscape management reduces biodiversity which makes these systems more vulnerable to collapse in changing conditions of the Anthropocene (Dunn 2021). This attempt to impose order is a form of self-harm. In addition, our cultural belief in an underlying order makes us tend to expect it where there is none, overestimating the scope of human knowledge about natural systems and their predictability. This is particularly dangerous in the current ecological crises. Dunn has coined Erwin's law in response to this, that "the living world is far vaster and more unexplored than we imagine it to be."(Dunn 2021:12).

Mess as Anomaly

What are the roots of this desire to evade or suppress disorder? Moving from sociology to anthropology may be helpful here. Mary Douglas, in her seminal text *Purity and Danger* (2005), claims that taboos function in all societies as a way of dealing with ambiguity. Things that do not fit easily within the system of thought become taboo as a way of "protect(ing) the local consensus on how the world is organised" (Douglas 2005:xi). Things that are ambiguous become taboo, become considered dirty, or messy. So why is the actuality of the more than human world, outside the clean lines of ecosystem models, taboo? Because it is ambiguous, messy, strange, *stuff* the reality not fitting neatly within a system of thought that perceives ecology as functional. Once you get close to it non-human life is uncanny and slimy as opposed to functional and mechanical. Douglas also argues that "A challenge to the established classification is brought under control by some theory of attendant harm" (2005:xiii) which is essentially what happens in broken windows theory and Nassauer's aesthetics of care—allowing disorder to grow engenders either the collapse of the community or loss of biodiversity. I am not arguing here against classification which Douglas argues, and I agree, is an inherent part of organisation, of human thought. I just want to underline that the mechanistic and correlationist view of nature that is central to our current system of thought is unable to deal with or even look squarely at autonomy in the more-than-human world without seeing it as signs of disorder.

For Morton it is the essential incoherence and lack of hard boundaries of the natural world that makes it so ambiguous and challenging to address. Rather than forming an orderly field of individual members of species performing functional processes, nature is a *mesh*, a:

a nontotalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the nonliving, between organism and environment. (Morton 2010a:275–276)

If, as Douglas argues, classification is inherent to human thought, then this quality, this intrinsic quality of nature presents challenges and invites taboos. Individual living creatures within this mesh (ourselves included) are, in Morton's terminology, *strange strangers*, simultaneously both strange and familiar. Strange strangers are both unique individuals and enmeshed parts of series (such as a species), autonomous but sharing "their DNA, their cell structure, subroutines in

the software of their brains” with many others (Morton 2010b:277). Morton’s writing about strange strangers also offers a critique of the idea of community at the heart of broken windows and the aesthetics of care. Community, for Morton, is inadequate in dealing with this enmeshedness because

The discourse of community ... is intrinsically conservative, if not reactionary, if not, at times, fascist. Community implies a boundary between inside and outside, which implies inclusion and exclusion: scapegoating. The antagonistic energy of the community is pasted onto the scapegoat, who is then sent outside the community to purge it of its contradictions. (Morton 2010b:278–9)

Perhaps the underlying impulse for order and control visible in the suburban fever-dream of broken windows theory is the partly unconscious realisation that we all already compromised. As Morton puts it, quoting Richard Dawkins’ *Extended Phenotype* (1982):

At the DNA level, the biosphere is permeable and boundariless: "the whole of the gene pool of the biosphere is available to all organisms" ... Yet we have bodies with arms, legs, and so on, and we regularly see all kinds of life-forms scuttling around. ... If anything, life is catastrophic, monstrous, nonholistic, and dislocated, not organic, coherent, or authoritative. (Morton 2010a:275)

It is this attempt to forge hard boundaries, to display and maintain clear, shared values in the service of community defines Nassauer’s aesthetics of care. The antagonistic energy of the community, of things not being neat and orderly all the way down is focused outwards on messy nature in attempted control. Is there an alternative? Morton suggests what he calls collectivity, where

... the antagonisms are directly a feature of coexistence as such. ... (that acknowledges) the difficulty of the strange stranger. ... Our ecological existence is ‘nearer than breathing, closer than hands and feet’. We’ve got others – rather, others have got us – literally under our skin. (Morton 2010b:278–9)

This suggests an opening. Perhaps we can begin to replace the model of a homogenous community antagonised by a messy nature, by bringing antagonism and difference back within a collective that also includes the more than human world. Here landscape maintenance and design becomes field of autonomy, antagonism, collaboration between different actors. Nature cannot be kept out and the antagonism generated by different worldviews—different worlds—is accepted as, at worst, unavoidable, at best, as a creative force.

Assumption iii. Nature is Culture

The Scenic and the Picturesque

In *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames*, Nassauer describes the landscape type that she later formalised into the scenic aesthetic as picturesque, beautiful and scenic (1995). Since she doesn’t always define or qualify these terms, it is left ambiguous as to what exactly is meant. All of these terms have specific histories and meanings as well as being used more colloquially. This said, rather than looking in the weeds of meanings of the beautiful, I think it makes most sense to understand Nassauer’s scenic aesthetic as category to house for those culturally appreciated landscapes which *aren’t* part of the aesthetic of care. Scenic landscapes therefore are those that look good *without* positive marks of human intention, where in fact the cultural

expectation is that they are uninhabited. In the following passage, Nassauer makes a distinction between what she then calls beautiful (later scenic) landscapes and attractive landscapes (later landscapes of care). Italics in original:

We are deeply attached to *beautiful* landscapes, and we have strong cultural conventions for how an *attractive* landscape should look. Landscapes that we describe as beautiful tend to conform to aesthetic conventions for the scenic, but they are relatively rare. Landscapes that we describe as attractive tend to conform to aesthetic conventions for the display of care, which can be exhibited in virtually any landscape. (Nassauer 1997:67)

Beautiful landscapes “tend to conform to aesthetic conventions for the scenic,” which are (in another quote) unusual, exotic landscapes of picture-postcard beauty:

We all know how to recognize a scenic landscape. It usually has steep slopes, a stream or lake, a curvilinear pattern of wooded areas, and open meadows or fields. These are the landscapes we have seen on postcards, sofa paintings and calendars for as long as we can remember, and these are the landscapes we seek when we are tourists. We have enshrined them in national parks and monuments because they are exotic, rare. (Nassauer 1988:974)

The scenic aesthetic therefore primarily denotes those conventionally beautiful landscapes that can be contrasted with those more mundane, inhabited and owned landscapes that the aesthetic of care and cues to care as a strategy is focused on. But the scenic aesthetic is not just a kind of negative category, and digging further into the assumptions behind this particular conception of rare and beautiful landscapes, a curious amalgam of the scenic and the picturesque, is revealing. The current inheritance of the picturesque in contemporary American landscape architecture is well summarised by Howett as “Olmsted’s vision of an idyllic pastoral park, quintessential emblem of a civilized, humanized natural world” (Howett 1987:3). This landscape of a civilised, humanized natural world is a powerful symbol. In her 1992 essay, “The appearance of ecological systems as a matter of policy”, Nassauer refers to Humphry Repton, the great eighteenth century landscape designer, and quotes his principles for the picturesque:

First, it must display the natural beauties and hide the natural defects of every situation; secondly, it should give the appearance of extent and freedom, by carefully disguising or hiding the boundary; thirdly, it must studiously conceal every interference of art, however expensive, by which the scenery is improved; making the whole appear the production of nature only; and fourthly, all objects of mere convenience or comfort, if incapable of being made ornamental, or of becoming proper parts of the general scenery, must be removed or cancelled ... (Nassauer 1992:242)

From this passage we are struck by the theatrical nature of the style, it’s emphasis on display, disguise and concealment. The picturesque is a highly artificial way to produce an entirely natural looking landscape. This is a style that produces landscapes that are unified, objectified, naturalised, alluring, and apparently limitless. The picturesque uses artifice to transform a landscape into the metaphor of a civilised, humanised natural world. The dangers of the picturesque tradition have been discussed much elsewhere. For example, how it emphasizes the visually beautiful, and reduces landscapes to two-dimensional views (Saito 1998), how it gives the illusion of the freezing of natural processes and how it can be used to erase histories and naturalize secular power (Williams 1973). Nassauer herself is aware of many of these tendencies (Nassauer 1997). However she argues that the

strength of the cultural recognition of scenic landscapes means that there is no short- or medium-term alternative to these conventions.

The Scenic Wilderness

Although not explicitly named as such, the key to Nassauer's scenic is, more than in the picturesque, to be found in the conception of wilderness. The idea of wilderness has its own distinct cultural traditions (Di Palma 2014), the most prevalent current iteration of which is the Romantic tradition of a raw, uplifting nature, free from human despoliation. Nassauer's critique of McKibben, who espouses one such Romantic view, is instructive. As is a comparison with William Cronon's seminal article *The Trouble with Wilderness* (1996) published more or less contemporaneously with *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames*.

In a 1992 article, Nassauer's accuses Bill McKibben of failing to see that nature is just a "social construction" (Nassauer 1992:241) which leads him to equate ecological health with "pristine (natural) beauty" (Nassauer 1992:240). In fact, Nassauer argues, landscapes that are conceived of as pristine can be ecologically poor and less beautiful landscapes can be ecologically rich. I think this is an important distinction that Nassauer makes. There is much research on, for example, the ecological barrenness of landscapes considered pristine and natural such as the Cambrian mountains in Wales (Monbiot 2014), and the resistance to management changes that would allow the regeneration of ecological complexity precisely because of their identification as pristine, wild landscapes. But the problem is how Nassauer then attempts to resolve the problem of the conceptual separation of humanity and nature, that lies behind the conception of a pristine natural world:

Some who identify nature as separate from humanity may conclude with McKibben that ecological systems are best left unsullied by human action. Others who identify nature as separate may see this separation as license for unbridled use of ecosystems. ... It follows that once separate from nature, we human beings may choose either to degrade or deify what we see as distinct from ourselves. (Nassauer 1992:241)

Because the problem is a conceptual separation of humanity and nature which must lead to idealisation or exploitation, argues Nassauer, the solution is to remove the distinction between humanity and nature altogether. For Nassauer, this means reconceptualising nature as a purely cultural construct, entirely reliant on human design and protection. Effectively, she applies the logic of the picturesque to the concept of wilderness:

we might assume that a nature preserve represents the absence of human influence when in fact the existence of intact remnants of indigenous ecosystems depends upon human protection and management. (Nassauer 1995:162)

In this framing, the independent existence of any more than human life becomes dependent on human grace and management, which is then extended to the idea that it is due to human grace and management, which is to say that it is a constructed landscape, conveying civilised, humanised values. The idea of the scenic wilderness, of any autonomous nature existing outside of culture, becomes then a simple case of "false identity" (Nassauer 1992:241), since there is no possibility of autonomous natural life outside of human culture in this conception. It's interesting to contrast this view with William Cronon's problematising of wilderness from a few years later—*The Trouble With Wilderness* (1996). While

Nassauer argues against the possibility of actual wilderness (since there is nothing outside the cultural), Cronon argues for dismantling the culture-nature binary in order to re-value and re-wild the domestic landscape:

we need to embrace the full continuum of a natural landscape that is also cultural, in which the city, the suburb, the pastoral, and the wild each has its proper place, which we permit ourselves to celebrate without needlessly denigrating the others. We need to honor the Other within and the Other next door as much as we do the exotic Other that lives far away... In particular, we need to discover a common middle ground in which all of these things, from the city to the wilderness, can somehow be encompassed in the word "home." Home, after all, is the place where finally we make our living. It is the place for which we take responsibility, the place we try to sustain. (Cronon 1996:19)

While both authors attempt to collapse the nature-culture binary: Nassauer argues that the natural is just cultural, Cronon suggests the that "natural ... is also cultural". Which is to say that Cronon wants to raise awareness of the wildness of our everyday landscapes, the shaping by autonomous more than human life in even in the most cultural environments, to rewild (perhaps an anachronistic term here) our conception of everyday landscapes, whereas Nassauer instead rejects the idea of the wild outright. I believe that by folding nature into culture here Nassauer reduces the more than human world to a back-drop. While the Romantic view of wilderness, with its big Other can lead to exoticisation or solipsism, it can also attempt to reach outside the human experience and the correlationist worldview. Reducing the more than human world to cultural form or functional ecology—as Nassauer's aesthetic does—leaves no room for other kinds of life, other kinds of intelligence, strangeness or autonomy.

Cronon writes that when we reject the classic idea of wilderness, the idea of an untouched nature, we are forced to ask ourselves

what kinds of marks we wish to leave.... (and) whether the Other must always bend to our will, and, if not, under what circumstances it should be allowed to flourish without our intervention. (Cronon 1996:18)

Nassauer is also concerned with what kind of marks we wish to leave. But for her there is no question of whether "the Other," (nature) needs to bend to our will, it is our duty to do so. By using the metaphor of landscape as child, in need of normative tending and directing, Nassauer refuses to take seriously any more than human autonomy and erects instead a moral duty of care for the landscape:

Care ... means watching over a place and intervening to achieve a proper landscape. In this way, landscapes are more like children than works of art. They require tending, not making. They do not thrive under absolute control ... ignorant care can make a spoiled child, overindulged with too much of a good thing. (Nassauer 1997:75)

The idea of of the more than human world acting autonomously, without human intervention, is therefore rejected as a form of irresponsibility or neglect

Return to the Sublime

Cronon locates the birth of the American conception of wilderness in a convergence of the Burkean sublime and the frontier myth. The Burkean sublime, Edmund Burke's particular categorisation of the sublime, refers to an experience where the subject's rationality is paralysed by the experience of something incomprehensible, vast or powerful. This experience stimulates self-preservation,

but also encourages social bonds as a reaction to encountering the terrifying Other. (Kirchhoff & Vicenzotti 2014). Often associated with the mountains or rushing water, the sublime is an overwhelming experience, the apprehension of raw natural power. Burke's categorisation had huge and lasting cultural influence, leading tourists to visit mountains and other landscapes that had previously been perceived as desolate and barren (Di Palma 2014). Nassauer's description of the scenic quoted above with its "steep slopes, a stream or lake" is, in contrast to Cronon's definition, a version of wilderness with the sublime removed. It is still craggy, "exotic, rare" and for "tourists" (Nassauer 1988:974) but it is no longer powerful. With the removal of the Burkean sublime with its potential for terror, the scenic landscape becomes a picture postcard.

Di Palma (2014) connects disgust and the sublime. She argues that the historically-fast shift in perception that saw mountains move from objects of disgust in the early modern period to objects of wonder in the nineteenth century can be traced to a shared emotion that underlies both disgust and the sublime. The disgust engendered by the broken landscape of a fallen world (as mountains were perceived previously) mutated into a sense of horrified fascination, these linked, adjacent emotions being at the core of both views and forming the pivot between them. Reversing this argument, the removal of the sublime in Nassauer's worldview creates a void that is filled with a kind of repressed disgust of the autonomous processes of the more-than-human-world—the fear and despising that the Burkean sublime supplanted. Without a sense of the sublime, when life acts outside the frames of architectural decision making—beyond providing attractive landscapes or functional ecosystems—such as a dandelion growing on a curb, the response is disgust and violence. The attitude in *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames* that I've linked to broken windows is perhaps an expression of the repressed disgust created when the more-than-human-world acts alive. By removing the sublime from the scenic, the power from the wilderness, Nassauer does not entirely succeed in humanizing the biosphere. Instead this denied awareness of non-human autonomy becomes discomfort or disgust. The attitudes I outlined in the last section on broken windows theory: the need for control, knee-jerk reactions to signs of autonomy, are perhaps a response to an autonomous more than human world that our worldview of functional ecology denies.

What would it look like if we were to try to re-insert the sublime into Nassauer's picture postcard landscapes as a way of re-engaging with the more than human? Morton describes how nature becomes more and more uncanny the closer you get to it, the more you examine it. He describes a walk into a typical picturesque landscape of lakes and mountains:

Now you are up close and personal with the rock. It stops being a nice background It starts to become quite strange: you see all kinds of crystals, all kinds of cures and shapes that don't have much relevance to your regular world. You may begin to see fossils – other lifeforms have been using this rock in a different way from you. Or perhaps you notice a bird has made its nest in a crevice. You start to realise that this isn't just your very own world. (Morton 2018:25)

This is the realisation that broken windows reacts to and tries to deny, that like the three bears, someone else is sitting in my chair, eating my porridge.

So there you are with your geologist's hammer and your special camera, and you have come up against the fact that hammerings and photographings of things aren't those things. Your picturesque world was so consistent that you forgot that this picturesque-ing was also an execution of things like lakes, trees and mountains. You thought you were seeing something directly: you probably call it nature. Nature sort of means something you forget about because its just functioning. (Morton 2018:26)

So in addition to this landscape being inhabited by other beings, it is formed by them. While nature "functions" properly, we can ignore these other beings, but when it doesn't we end up nose to nose with them.

The problem that Morton identifies is that an interpretation of a thing is not a thing. Our models of ecosystems are not ecosystems. This point may sound too obvious, but acting as though they are is a way of continuing to deny non human autonomy. New technologies in particular are encouraging a belief that we can, for example, see like bees or feel like plants when that is not what we're doing: a visualisation of what a bee sees is not what a bee sees. It may be a useful visualisation but it is not an insight into a bee's inner world. Whether the tools are GIS and flow diagrams or a hammer and a camera, as Morton writes:

So your scientific view of things up close with a hammer and a camera, doesn't mean you're 'seeing' nature; you are still interpreting it with human tools and a human touch. (Morton 2018:27)

In fact, the unknowability, the strangeness of other life is precisely what we need to accept if we are to design with more than human autonomy. Morton refers to other lifeforms as *strange strangers*

Strange strangers are uncanny in the precise Freudian sense that they are familiar and strange simultaneously. Indeed, their familiarity is strange, and their strangeness is familiar. Strange strangers are unique, utterly singular. They cannot be thought as part of a series (such as species or genus) without violence. Yet their uniqueness is not such that they are utterly independent. They are composites of other strange strangers. We share their DNA, their cell structure, subroutines in the software of their brains. They are absolutely unique and so capable of forming a collective of life forms, rather than a community. Community is a holistic concept that is greater than the sum of its parts. Since the Interdependence Theorem implies that there is no whole (such as 'animals', Nature and so on), community can only ever be a conceptual construct. (Morton 2010b:277)

It is the deep familiarity and utter unfamiliarity that makes them strange. It is their individuality and everything they share with each other and others. They are uncanny, monstrous.

So how do we re-introduce the possibility of the more than human into cues to care? The sublime may offer a possibility. I've introduced the terrifying, overwhelming Burkean sublime already. By contrast, in the Kantian sublime the subject is almost overwhelmed by something vast or powerful, *but from a safe vantage point*. The uncomfortable pleasure in the sublime is in the subject's awareness of both the limitations of their faculties and being able to conceive of these limits—the ability to conceive of vastness.

Exceedingly vast or disorderly natural phenomena overwhelm our imaginative faculties; but rather than straightforwardly triggering aversion and fear they can also evoke 'negative pleasure' ... (the mathematically sublime). The situation is similar if we observe – from a safe vantage point natural phenomena whose physical power would otherwise overwhelm us (the dynamically sublime). This

negative pleasure occurs every time the realisation of our limitations as sensual beings awakens ‘a feeling of a supersensible faculty within us’. ‘Therefore the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation’ as rational beings. (Kirchhoff & Vicenzotti 2014:449–450)

Both interpretations rely, as discussed earlier in relation to Di Palma, on a distinctive combination of enjoyment and disgust, and it is here that the sublime can be useful as a tool. The sublime is useful because it deals with discomfort and vastness—not necessarily in terms of space but of comprehensibility. The Kantian sublime is at root an enjoyable, self-conscious engagement with something that’s ungraspable. Either in power or vastness. This makes it useful as a way to engage with Morton’s strange strangers—with the ungraspable.

The problem with both the Kantian and Burkean sublime in terms of our purpose here is that their focus is actually too focused on the human subject, not what they are engaging with:

Thus wilderness is not itself sublime – as Shaftesbury and, as we shall see below, Burke and Herder claim but is rather a distinguished place where the subject confirms his own rational nature as it transcends sensuous and instinctive nature. (Kirchhoff & Vicenzotti 2014:449–450)

Morton suggests a new form of the sublime based on intimacy with the more than human, which he refers to as the Longinian sublime. Where the experience of the sublime is a kind of imprinting by another object, something outside the self:

There isn’t much difference between human souls, if they exist, and the souls of badgers, ferns, and seashells. The Longinian sublime is based on coexistence. At least one other thing exists, apart from me: that “noble mind,” whose footprint I find in my inner space. By contrast, the more familiar concepts of the sublime are based on the experience of just one person ... Longinus puts the sublime a way back in the causal sequence, in the “noble” being that leaves its footprint on you. In this sense, it’s in the object, in the not-me. Thus the sublime tunes us to what is not me. This is good news in an ecological era. Before it’s fear or freedom, the sublime is coexistence. (Morton 2013:137)

The potential dangers of taking this kind of intimacy too far are outlined by De Block and Vicenzotti (2018), where the authors question the viability of theories of affect to prompt ethical action. Specifically, they question the wisdom of collapsing the distance between the human subject and the more-than-human-other to create a kind of interlinked and depoliticised oneness. Instead, Vicenzotti and De Block argue for the maintenance of “an uneasy relation of disturbance between the human ‘I’ and non-human ‘other’” rather than “an intimate closeness and continuity between object and subject” (2018:10), the preservation of distance allowing space for critical thought and therefore political action. While I find their arguments persuasive in terms of the perils of an apolitical collapsing into oneness that ultimately works against agency and political action, I think that intimacy can exist without continuity. That we are, for example, entirely intimate with unknowable beings like our macrobiota at the same time as we live conceptually apart from them, maintaining an uneasy relationship with them.

Vicenzotti and Block also argue for a new sublime in response to the ethical collapsing of the distinction between human and nature in theories of affect. They show the possibilities of the sublime in repoliticising relations with the more than human world:

In theories of affect, with no distance between human and environment, but only the intricate web of human/non-human relations, the freedom in the way to relate to the world, to think about our relation to the non-human, is foreclosed. As such, affect can only result in a de-politicizing acting of care and nurture for companion species, in a relation of codependency, whereas the sublime experience has the potential to instigate a critical, political act, outside normalised space. In this way, the sublime experience could also be a way to create an opening for the constitutive outsider, for the ‘always-immanent possibility of forms of acting that undermine, transform, or supersede existing relational configurations,’ as argued by Swyngedouw and Ernstson. (De Block & Vicenzotti 2018:10)

This sublime is a form of disruption intended to provoke new perspectives. They argue for a postmodern sublime (after Lyotard) that “avoids both dystopian and utopian images of nature, and instead questions the very idea of nature, or even more so, human/non-human relations.” at the same time as it sets up, in a Kantian way, “an incommensurability between reality and concept to confront us with the limits of our senses and in doing so, generates freedom.” (de Block & Vicenzotti 2018:10). It is this doubling, this zooming back and forth that is also crucial and useful in the sublime. And for De Block and Vicenzotti, just as for Morton, it is located in stating and restating the impossible gap between our concepts and the real, between order and mess, and staying with that discomfort and, crucially, continuing to acknowledge autonomous life outside of ourselves.

Towards A New Cues to Care

Where to Begin?

Now that the underlying metaphysics has been reframed, is cues to care still a useful tool within landscape architecture? In their argument for distance and a restored sublime, de Block and Vicenzotti are critical of the very idea of care (or at least, a particular conception of care), seeing it as part of the turn to affect that tends to depoliticise landscape practice.

Instead of engaging with the world by means of normalized practices like care, empathy, and concern, in which we are caught up uncritically, the sublime is about engaging with dissensus, disruption, and indeed the political. (De Block & Vicenzotti 2018:10)

How can we make interventions that dissent and disrupt when caring itself is a normative act? I’ve discovered just such normativity by tracing the idea of care in Nassauer’s writing. But I think that care is not just and not always normative. Just as I argue above that intimacy without continuity is possible and can form the basis of a new sublime, the act of care can be about the active provision of needs instead of a depoliticised empathy. Care can be active engagement with rather than the maintenance of the status quo. Care can be a reason to dispute, rather than to placate the neighbours. This suggests that care, and therefore cues to care can be valid. But if we move on from a position that views care as the human branding on

a correlationist nature, as sociable demonstrations of order and the etching of community boundaries, what can cues to care become?

A Manifesto as Suggestive Sketch

The following short manifesto is intended as a self contained jumping off point for an alternative aesthetic of care within landscape design; a list of possibilities drawn in no particular order from the analysis in the previous sections. My intention with this is to indicate possibilities for landscape design by placing together in one place some of the ideas that I came across and developed in the previous sections; I'm not pretending to present a definitive list of strategies or approaches. The manifesto is a response to the question: What approach would an aesthetic of care that engages with the more than human world take?

1. It could be based on Morton's reading of ooo aesthetics, the sensory field between unknowable objects. Cues to care becomes the placing of a new object among existing objects with all the new relationships, aesthetic fall-out and knock-on affects that go with it. A cue to care is the obelisk in *2001: A Space Odyssey* rather than a ribbon, a name tag or a brand. (Morton 2013)
2. It could be collaborative without being a community. Every landscape design is an ultimately unpredictable collaborative process with both human and more than human actors, whether we like it or not, with all the messy antagonism, difference and politics that that brings with it. (Morton 2010a)
3. It is regarded as permeable, compromised. It gets unavoidably mixed up in its neighbours. (Morton 2010a)
4. It is unsettling. It draws attention to the specific, the personal, the alien and the temporary. It leans into the icky. (Morton 2010b)
5. It is distancing, it allows space for more than human needs. It doesn't pretend to understand or predict everything. It is time based, it is only open sometimes. (De Block & Vicenzotti 2018; Morton 2013)

Reimagining Cues to Care

In order to make the tentative re-imagining of an aesthetic of care in the previous manifesto less abstract, I will now draw from existing projects exemplifying approaches to cues to care that fit within these paradigms. In the interests of coherence, I've attempted to divide them into three categories: cues to care as collaboration, cues to care as lens, and cues to care as veil. These categories are not definitive and they don't map at all onto the previous three sections of analysis.

Cues to Care as Collaboration

Girona's shores is a large scale landscape project by EMF landscape architects that has used responsive, immersed and collaborative design to open up Girona's

overgrown hinterlands. Because of budgetary constraints, EMF were forced to carry out the project backwards: After persuading the municipality to lend them their maintenance team, they created the design and maintenance plan by incrementally drawing with extensive methods in the landscape, while slowly devising a set of simple principles to deal with most circumstances (Franch 2018:63). By being forced into this way of working, the landscape architect was brought down to ground level. Unable to magic up new vistas on the screens of clunk-materialism, unable to finesse every detail digitally before it was imposed, EMF had worked with other groups as co-designers and with the landscape itself as a co-designer, a responsive, evolving, iterative collaboration involving a shifting collective (figure 3).



Figure 3: Work brigade co-designing on the ground at Girona. Picture by EMF used with permission.

Franch, EMF's founder, references "messy" landscape and "orderly frames" in his Girona article (ibid.: 59), and so we can see the influence of Nassauer's ideas. But does the Girona's shores project have the same relationship with order that I've explored in Nassauer? Vistas are opened, serpentine paths are mown, and the conventions of the picturesque park are used. But there is something too ad hoc about Franch's interventions, they are too limited to be marks of unassailable order, and their obviously temporary or improvised quality underscores the collaborative nature of this project—both with the work brigades themselves but also with the specific places, objects and organisms that the design was made on and with using trimmers, loppers and chainsaws. The design contributions at Girona have the feel of a sketch on the landscape more than they feel like an authoritative stamp. One reason for this is the limited area that can be maintained: 50% is left almost entirely unmanaged, and another 25% is only mown annually—so you can see how the woodland would drift back in given a fallow year or two (Franch 2018:60). What

makes this project work is its limitations, it is shaped by the limits of its tools and reach. It can't dominate, or chooses not to, so instead makes do by "carefully intensifying what is already there" and "gentle notations on the site itself" (Franch 2018:58). The result is an intermediate disturbance rather than a catastrophic void. There is enough convention and intention to invite human visitors, but not enough to normatively fix the landscape.

The experiments within adventure playgrounds in the '60s and '70s as described by Arvid Bengtsson (Bengtsson 1973) are similar in that they are based on a collaboration, different in that they set up this collaboration to begin once the design is finished. The laying out of materials acts as a cue to construct and adapt. The result (if there can really be result from an endless process of making and un-making) is often considered messy, even disgusting, perhaps dangerous. While a conventional climbing frame looks neat while functioning as a symbol giving permission for children and play, the adventure playgrounds that Bengtsson records open up much more for autonomy, development and experimentation.

Cues to Care as Lens

I've borrowed the term "lens" from EMF's Girona's Shores project where two short sections of railing act to focus the visitors attention on fossils in the rock. (Franch 2018:68) These cues to care are, at their simplest, interventions that direct attention, that draw focus to the peculiarity of an object. This drawing of attention can function as an invitation, as in the the seating placed loosely on the riverbank elsewhere in Girona's shores (figure 4): A clear invitation to the human visitor to act in a particular way, giving permission. But I think it helps if these elements feel contingent, temporary and improvised in some way, because the lens also then becomes an invitation to collaborate. The Smelly Valley graffiti wall in Natur-Park Südgelände is an example of this kind of lens (Langer 2021), where there is clear implied invitation to take part. This kind of lens becomes more open ended—rather than focusing on one object or action ("fossils" or "sit"), it acts as a suggestion to continue a process.



Figure 4: Ad hoc furniture (made by the work brigade) invites presence and collaboration. Photo by EMF, used with permission.

As well as an invitation, lenses can also interact with what they draw attention in a more complicated way, inspired by Morton's object oriented ontology. If we follow Morton's arguments, we can approach both all the objects on site as unique and

complex and ultimately withdrawn, but also be aware of how any objects we introduce will interact with objects on site in unique and complex ways. My first example of this (figure 5) is a small golden face attached to a tree about 20 centimetres above the ground, found on the path to a nature reserve in Stockholm. The face acts as a lens, drawing your attention to just this tree, but it also affects how you see the tree in relation to the face's qualities. It draws attention and it affects perception. In addition, the questions of who and why it was attached make the aesthetic reaction stronger, more unpredictable.



Figure 5: Small gold face on a tree trunk (bottom left). Photo author's own.

A more developed example is from EMF's project at Cap de Creus, where a chain of objects and associations creates interesting results. Cap de Creus is an old holiday resort repurposed as a nature reserve, and here the rugged coastal landscape is known for its unusual rock formations, used by Salvador Dali as the inspiration for his paintings. EMF's intention was to draw a link between the striking rock formations of the site and Dali's paintings, a playful reminder. Rather than using a standard information signage (a few paragraphs of text on Dali's life, pictures of his works, and so on) EMF decided to etch simplified versions of Dali's images onto simple metal signs that were then placed by the path in view of the rocks that inspired them (figures 6 and 7). The result is a charged relationship between three objects in each (the rocks, the sign and the absent but referenced painting). And a reminder that a representation is a new object in the world, not the thing it represents.

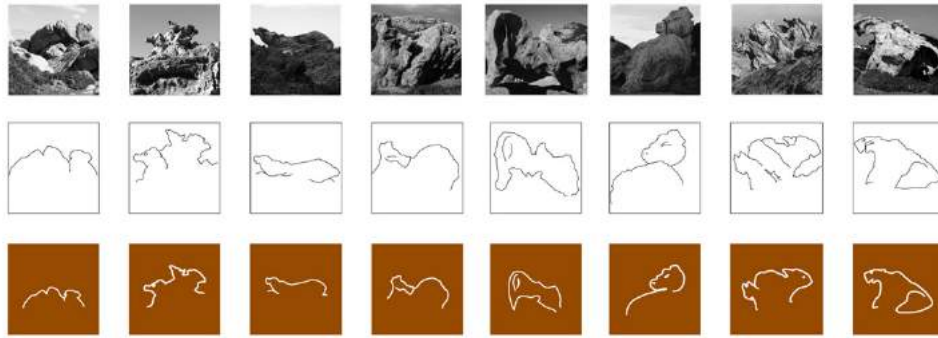


Figure 6: Descriptive image showing the rocks in the landscape (top), simplified into line drawings (middle), carved into metal plates (bottom). Image by EMF, used with permission.



Figure 7: Detail. One of the plates containing a rock drawing. Photo by EMF, used with permission.

Cues to Care as Veil

Natur-Park Südgelände was, until the division of Berlin in 1945, a busy railyard. Over the next decades the largely undisturbed site was transformed through spontaneous ecological development (Langer 2021). The park developed without any human direction from a bare railyard site—to what is currently a complex, novel ecosystem of dense woodland and glades. The awareness of this bare starting

point, indicated by the cues to care of deliberately retained rails and other mechanisms, makes visceral the influx of lifeforms and their forming of the site and themselves over time, establishing, growing, dying and creating new habitats that allow others to move in. The fact that the site is a novel ecosystem of indigenous and native species, means that we are even more aware of the antagonistic, exploratory nature of this development—this is no “natural” process where nature moves in, heals, reclaims her own. This is ongoing, abundant, explosive and new.



Figure 8: Raised paths at Südgelände lead the visitor through the park while maintaining a clear separation from the woodland. Photo author's own.

But the design interventions used in the park have the effect of suggesting a more traditional landscape framing. The tracks and buildings that are preserved add a picturesque feel and, in what feels like a classic piece of landscape park design, the large section of the site that is designated as of particular ecological worth is accessed only via a series of paths, some raised (figure 8) that allow visitors to walk through a landscape of forests and glades, interspersed with sculptures (figure 9), relics, and viewing platforms at various heights. These encourage the visitor to perceive the park as a promenade and with a certain appreciative detachment. Although in a large area of the park “the visitor may move about completely freely.” (Kowarik & Langer 2005:292), this is not how the park is experienced. We are left with other associations instead: the reverence of the nature reserve, the walk with views of the landscape park, the vine-covered buildings of the picturesque. Andreas Langer refers to the park as a “new wilderness (2021:26), and of course the idea of wilderness means that nature here becomes something to preserve, not to be polluted by human engagement. Therefore visitors must be kept physically distant if encouraged to observe. At Südgelände the (raised) paths are a kind of veil—that separate the visitor from the undergrowth. But this distancing is

the familiar distance of the scenic, of wilderness. Are there other kinds of veils that can create a more oscillating distance as I discussed in the idea of a new sublime? There are I believe some possibilities.

One such strategy is employed at Parc Henri Matisse in Lille where Gilles Clement's Derborence Island rises, inaccessible and encased in concrete slabs (figures 10). Here the entire artificial hill with its almost spontaneous growth is prevented from becoming scenic by the fact that it's too high to see more than the edges of the vegetation (figure 11) as well as by the ugliness of the plinth that holds it. It is held up as a landscape to admire and simultaneously occluded. This combination of ugliness and hiddenness in Derborence Island can be read as a giant cue to care that draws on this new sublime, that draws attention by being unsettling. The idea that such a visible, public landscape is closed for access and prospect is provoking and part of that provocation ties into the fear and disgust of autonomous processes.



Figure 9: The path at Südgelände passes glades and sculptures. Photo author's own.



Figure 10: The sheer concrete walls of Derborence Island at Parc Henri Matisse, Lille. Photo author's own.

To avoid the scenic trap, veils can create distance but temporarily and contingently. They can shift around. A veil is something that is raised and lowered, is porous rather than solid, can be moved around. Instead of the fixed paths and viewing platforms of Südgelände where the “wilderness” is held at a permanent distance, veils can be a way of temporarily closing of areas to problematize the idea of the objective view and the humanised, limitless landscape. Tempelhof field, Berlin, is an example of this where large central areas are sealed off by temporary fencing each year to provide habitat for the Eurasian skylark figure 12 (Carver & Gardner 2022). By allowing and preventing access in this way, natural autonomy is made both more and less visible for visitors, both more familiar and more mysterious.



Figure 11: The visitor can only see the growth that spills over the edges of the Derborence Island, the rest is entirely inaccessible. Photo author's own.



Figure 10: A temporary barrier demarcates an area of meadow every summer for breeding eurasian skylarks, Tempelhof. Photo by Leonhard Lenz, 2019, used under creative commons licensing.

EMFs paths at Girona are also veil-like in that there is not necessarily a permanent divide between areas that are scrub and those that are paths, they can move from year to year, meadow becoming path again. Another version of paths as both veils and collaboration is found in Gille Clement's conceptual *le jardin en mouvement* (garden in movement), where mown paths shift as the gardener responds to the growth and movement of other species

The Garden in Movement is a gardening method that favours the living over form. This does not mean that there is an absence of form, but rather that it emerges through gardening, over time, and it changes depending on what the gardener deems important to conserve or to remove. It is not completely *laissez-faire* but rather a series of minor interventions, in such a way as to work as much as possible with—and as little as possible against—nature. The gardener works on this in an opposing economy of energy, avoiding destruction under the pretext of “cleaning up”! When a plant begins to grow in the middle of a path, it is legitimate to ask the question of whether to modify its route rather than just removing it. All of the plants that settle spontaneously in a garden are worthy of consideration; there are no “weeds.” Formal work comes second then in my approach to space. Most plants choose their own place, they are travelers and wanderers—on the scale of the garden as on the scale of the planet—carried by winds, currents, the pelts of animals, birds, and the soles of feet. (Chiambaretta & Clement n.d.)

Further Discussion: Law-like Aesthetics, Messy Aesthetics

The debate about ethics, aesthetics and language; about the ecological responsibilities and the limits or possibilities for landscape architecture to make or communicate new aesthetics is still ongoing and perhaps unresolvable. Nassauer's article (1995) arises out of one iteration of this debate with Eaton and Nassauer taking more or less one side, Howett (1987) and Spirn (1988) urging for new ecological aesthetics on the other. More recently Meyer (2008) and Treib (2018) amongst others have contributed to the debate. One argument against landscape architects being able to alter the symbolic language of design (i.e. generating new aesthetics) is that language is shared and new meanings only follow the creation of new values. I've already mentioned how Nassauer argues for the necessity of landscape designers using well-accepted "law-like" aesthetic conventions (1997:68). Her argument follows Marcia Muelder Eaton's conception of how language functions symbolically. Eaton argues that since languages rely on a "core of shared meaning ... new meanings will often have to wait upon new values." (1990:27) which is to say that landscape architecture must follow cultural trends rather than being able to shape them. Leaving aside due to time constraints the question of whether language actually works as Eaton describes (I don't believe it does—I think it is adaptable, contradictory and open ended as well as shared which allows room for generating new aesthetics), her argument becomes familiar when she lays out the conditions to be met before a society is ready "to perceive certain kinds of landscapes as beautiful" (1990:24). These are: homogeneity (for Eaton the prerequisite for a shared culture) and control:

Aesthetic judgment always depends upon the possibility of exercising control sufficient to attend to intrinsic properties of a thing or event. ... Someone in a burning house will not be likely to enjoy the color or shape of the flames. (ibid.)

And this is quite a jump, quite a broken-windows jump, from lack of control in a landscape to—even figuratively—burning to death. I believe it reveals the same kind of catastrophic thinking that I looked at earlier. And, as earlier, Eaton's view is built on the necessity of homogeneity (the closed community) and control. I am personally more sympathetic to Howett's view where she uses Olmsted as an example of how landscape architects can take "new world-views ... expressed in art even before an integrated vision is articulated through discursive modes of thought and language" and give "expression to that new vision of the world and of our place in it whose outlines we now see emerging." (1987:11). In other words, Howett believes that it is possible, with landscape architecture as with the other arts, to begin to coalesce worldviews that are still in the process of forming, rather than waiting till they are fully articulated elsewhere.

Another of Eaton's arguments points towards why a messy aesthetic is, in itself, insufficient as a solution to the difficulties I've outlined in this thesis. She argues that restored prairies can only be enjoyed now because the original wilderness was tamed in the past:

Controlling wilderness is a necessary step on the road to enjoying restored original prairies. First the prairie was tamed and "beautified" accordingly, then it

was made beautiful by bringing it into accord with picturesque standards, and now it is remanipulated by making it consistent with current landscape theorists' ideas of what was there to be enjoyed in the original Control still plays a role: one suspects that even clients who agree to have their land designed according to new restoration standards will be permitted to put out prairie fires when they occur!(Eaton 1990:24)

So control is essential for the enjoyment of landscape, while the aesthetic can and does vary. This is why a messy aesthetic is insufficient as a way of preserving or valuing more than human life, since within a messy aesthetic the idea that nature must kept absolutely in check can continue unquestioned. Since the '90s, designs incorporating messy aesthetics have gained influence and won awards: Piet Oudolf's High Line plantings, Nigel Dunnet's contribution to the Olympic Park, Natur-Park Südgelände, and EMFs Girona's Shores are just a few of the many lauded international examples. But a messy aesthetic doesn't necessarily address the questions of control and autonomy that still define our relationship with the more than human world. A messy aesthetic on its own, just as it was with William Robinson's 1870 *The Wild Garden* (Robinson 1987), is about theatrics not ethics. Peter Latz, designer of the Duisburg-Nord Landscape Park and therefore a central figure in developing a messy aesthetic in landscape architecture, is a good example. Latz, when interviewed about Duisburg-Nord, expresses clearly the functional, mechanistic view of ecosystems I described earlier where "the technical idea is to try to integrate natural sequences as much as possible" (Weilacher 2008:128). He also absolutely rejects any measure of more than human autonomy in his designs, equating it, in a way that is by now becoming familiar, with catastrophe:

I am absolutely allergic to the idea that nature should reconquer something for itself. That is definitely not what is intended, as it simply means that nature is triumphing over technology. Then we have lost society as a whole." (Weilacher 2008:128–129)

So a messy aesthetic in itself is absolutely compatible with a functional, correlationist view of ecosystems and a denial of more than human autonomy.

Conclusion

Cues to care as a strategy defined by Nassauer contains tensions which work against its intended purpose. While attempting to preserve the complex fabric of the more than human world, it abides by and reinforces a conceptual framing that is opposed to this complexity. Ecology, if considered as a functional system, is a way of conceiving of the more than human world as a kind of mechanised provider of services. Timothy Morton's version of object oriented ontology, as I've described, offers an alternative view. The conception of ecological functionality, when combined with a belief in the need to tidy up the messy appearance of the more than human, has the effect of distrusting and working against more than human autonomy in landscape architecture. In addition, the prioritising of orderly

distinctions and hard boundaries does not fit with current understanding of the biosphere or help with human endeavours. Harcourt's analysis of broken windows theory suggests that the policing of messy ecosystems is not only a failed attempt to maintain integrity (of a community, of an organism, of a design) but also an active re-creation of these values. Believing that landscapes are culturally produced and culturally viewed should not blind us to the fact that they are only ever co-produced with and inhabited by other organisms, by strange strangers in Morton's term. Eliding this can lead to a view of the world where only humans are autonomous, inhabiting a stage set of more or less messy nature. An alternative view, as described, is one that accepts the more than human world as both deeply familiar and deeply unfamiliar. As embedded in and co-authoring human culture and history but alien and unknowable. A revived sublime can offer a tool to reengage with the more than human world while maintaining a critical distance: an oscillating view between the familiar and unfamiliar, intimacy and incomprehension.

By using contemporary projects in my sketches for an alternative cues to care, I hope to have shown that cues to care already isn't monolithic; the term in practice seems always to have been pleasantly slippery. My search for pointers towards a new aesthetic of care ends in questions that lie at the heart of our profession. Is it our job to make nature look more natural? How do we conceive of our living medium of strange strangers and the mesh and of our working relationship with them? What imaginaries can and do we choose to use and how do they free us to design in new ways? Should we try to shape aesthetic preferences? What is our responsibility to the more than human life on and around our sites? Almost thirty years have passed since *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames* was published and these questions have only become more pertinent.

I am not suggesting that nature should be left alone to just be. I am not arguing, as I believe Nassauer does, that nature should be marked to fit anthropocentric assumptions about what it is and how it should behave. This marking, as I have argued, tends towards a dominating and shaping of the more than human world beyond actual human needs and a reflexive distrust or disgust. Rather I am suggesting that there is worth in drawing attention to the double familiarity and strangeness of the more than human world, and developing a minimalist design language that, in different ways, points to, engages or collaborates with it. Some forms of cues to care that I've described could fit this need. As Morton puts it, the ever-increasing knowledge that humanity is not the master of the universe, that we are not even masters of ourselves (psychologically, genetically and so on), that instead "we are decentered beings ... inhabiting a universe of autonomous processes" makes it necessary to find a design approach that reflects that knowledge rather than a continued pretence of domination and mastery. We need to practice "weakness rather than mastery, fragmentariness rather than holism, and deconstructive tentativeness rather than aggressive assertion" (Morton 2010a:277–8)

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