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The Role of Aesthetics in World-making

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The Role of Aesthetics in World-Making

Yuriko Saito

Abstract

Arnold Berleant's *oeuvre* spanning five decades is devoted to restoring aesthetics' connection to the rest of our lives. In this paper, I shall join him by highlighting the crucial role aesthetics plays in shaping our lives and the world by interacting with objects, environments, and people. I show how our seemingly innocuous and trivial aesthetic tastes and preferences regarding everyday objects and activities have a surprisingly significant power to determine our attitudes, judgments, and actions, often with serious political, environmental, and moral implications. In light of this power of the aesthetic to affect the quality of life and the state of the world, I argue that all of us are responsible for cultivating aesthetic literacy, becoming vigilant about the ramifications of our aesthetic life, and directing our aesthetic life toward better world-making.

Key Words

disinterestedness, everyday aesthetics, negative aesthetics, power of the aesthetic, social aesthetics

1. Spectator-oriented aesthetics

Modern Western aesthetics that emerged during the eighteenth century is characterized by the following two features. First, it is primarily concerned with the aesthetic experience of the viewers, audience members, and readers. Second, with the emphasis on disinterestedness as the distinguishing mark of an aesthetic experience, the sphere of the aesthetic is relatively unencumbered by other areas of human concerns such as the

moral, political, religious, scientific, and practical. Thus, the model for aesthetic discourse is a spectator deriving an aesthetic experience from an object in relative isolation from the rest of life.

This model of aesthetics is by no means universally shared. In Western aesthetics, Friedrich Nietzsche challenged this model. He pointed out that aesthetics has been formulated from the viewpoint of the “*receivers* of art” and “in all philosophy hitherto the artist is lacking.”[1] He singles out Kant in this regard, arguably the most influential aesthetician at his time as well as today: “Kant, like all philosophers, instead of envisaging the aesthetic problem from the point of view of the artist (the creator), considered art and the beautiful purely from that of the ‘*spectator*’.”[2] Nietzsche’s own aesthetics is rather concerned with how one becomes an artist of one’s own life by giving it “an aesthetic justification,” which consists of rendering its every aspect, including those aspects which are difficult to accept, a part of an organic whole. Just as a dissonance in music or a painful event in a tragedy is indispensable to an aesthetic whole, “as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands all the good conscience to be able to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon.”[3] As such, “in man creature and creator are united” and the man who fancies that “he is a spectator and listener who has been placed before the great visual and acoustic spectacle that is life ... overlooks that he himself is really the poet who keeps creating this life.”[4] Thus, for Nietzsche, the significance of aesthetics in our lives is profound because it provides a strategy for fashioning a good life. Accordingly, there is no separation between the aesthetic, the moral, and the existential in his view.

When we put spectator-oriented Western aesthetics in a global context, its limitations also become evident. The Japanese aesthetic tradition, for one, is dominated by the teachings of the practitioners of various arts. One commentator observes: “Japanese aestheticians ... have generally very little to say about the relationship between the work and the audience, or about the nature of literary and art criticism.”[5] In this tradition, what may at first appear to be a how-to manual for an artistic practice turns out to be a discourse on how to live one’s life. Mostly Zen priests or students of Zen Buddhism, Japanese art masters and their disciples all emphasize selfless devotion, rigorous self-discipline, and constant practice in the chosen artistic medium, not only as a means to achieving artistic excellence, but more importantly as a way of experiencing enlightenment and self-fulfillment. For example, the sixteenth century tea master, Sen

no Rikyū, defines “the art of tea” as “the way through which one attains spiritual awakening.”[6] Thus, the Japanese aesthetic tradition, like Nietzsche’s philosophy, regards aesthetics as a practice to achieve a good life, overcoming any separation between and among the aesthetic, the moral, the existential, the spiritual, and the practical.

This quick examination of Nietzsche’s aesthetics and Japanese artistic tradition helps illuminate the limitations of the model still prevalent in contemporary Anglo-American aesthetics. Arnold Berleant’s theory of aesthetic field and aesthetic engagement, spanning five decades, has consistently maintained that the locus of the aesthetic is neither exclusively in the spectator nor in the object of appreciation but rather in the experience created by the active engagement of the subject with the object. According to him, modern Western aesthetics’ tendency to secure its autonomy gave rise to “the usual description of the aesthetic attitude as contemplative, passive, and disinterested, quite removed from the dynamic physical engagement that characterizes the way we usually react with our surroundings.”[7] On the contrary, when we have an aesthetic experience, we are a co-creator of the experience, integrating a rich reservoir of associations, contributions of imagination, as well as responses to sensory stimuli provided by the object. Thus, Berleant characterizes aesthetic appreciation as “a creative act, one that takes developed skill and thoughtful determination, very much the same abilities that the artist employs in her work.”[8] Hence, aesthetic appreciation is reciprocal in that “it is not only receptive; it is equally active, requiring the contribution of the appreciator of art or nature in discerning qualities, order, and structure and in adding the resonance of meanings to that experience.”[9]

In addition to challenging the aforementioned model prevalent in contemporary Western aesthetics, Berleant also calls attention to “an aesthetic undercurrent” in every aspect of human life, not just in the realm of art.[10] He reminds us that “to the extent that every thing, every place, every event is experienced by an aware body with sensory directness and immediate significance, it has an aesthetic element. For the fully engaged participant, an aesthetic factor is always present.”[11] Furthermore, because of its prevalence and ability to affect us, aesthetics wields a potent power to shape our lives and the world, although this power has neither been sufficiently recognized nor appreciated. Berleant instead maintains that “by recognizing the profound implications and the transformative possibilities of the aesthetic, we can help shape that world to make our place in it more generous and fulfilling.”[12] In what

follows, I shall join Berleant in his effort to restore aesthetics' all-too-important connection to the rest of life.

2. Examples of the power of the aesthetic[13]

2.1. Political persuasion

Aesthetics is a powerful ally to political persuasion. Many of us are familiar with the utilization of arts in this regard, but not of the contributions made by the aesthetics of everyday environments and objects. Landscape aesthetics is pertinent in this regard. As Berleant points out, "national groups commonly possess a mystique about their land" and "part of that mystique is an affection for their landscape and its beauty." [14] One such example is Nazi Germany's program of creating a landscape worthy of the Aryan race by eradicating alien plant species while restoring and cultivating native species, in a chilling parallel to their ethnic cleansing of humans. According to their agenda, "the area must be given a structure which corresponds to our type of being ... so that the Teutonic German person will feel himself to be at home so that he settles there and is ready to love and defend his new home." Hence, it is necessary "to cleanse the German landscape of unharmonious foreign substance." [15]

Even less known is an example from pre-World War II Japan. After two and half centuries of isolation from the rest of the world, Japan finally opened its doors in 1868, initiating a sudden and rapid process of Westernization. In its own estimation, Japan could not compete against Western civilization except for its aesthetic and artistic heritage, which provided a source of cultural identity and national pride. It started with Shiga Shigetaka's *Nihon Fūkeiron (Theory of Japanese Landscape)*, which extols the beauty of Japanese landscapes, considered superior to those outside of Japan. Trained as a geologist, Shiga was also a member of the ultra-nationalist party and the year of publication of this book, 1894, coincided with the Sino-Japanese war.

The time-honored Japanese aesthetics of cherry blossoms provides the most poignant and striking example in this regard. The ephemerality embodied in their graceful falling after a short-lived presence promoted war-time patriotism by serving as a potent symbol for Kamikaze pilots. [16] Alan Tansman also notes that the praise for the aesthetics of everyday objects such as bridges in several popular pre-World War II literary pieces contributed to encouraging Japanese nationalism. He points out that this "rhetoric ostensibly meant to beautify work, the workplace, and everyday life" was quite powerful, and that the

“diffuse yet thorough ‘administration of aesthetics’” was “insidious and effective ... to the extent they worked atmospherically.”[17]

Although without similar dire political consequences, the American wilderness aesthetic that developed during the nineteenth century was also motivated by the relatively young nation’s attempt to formulate its own nature aesthetic as a way of promoting national identity and pride. At first plagued by an inferiority complex regarding America’s uncultivated, crude, and uncouth landscape in comparison with civilized European lands, nineteenth century American intellectuals put a positive spin on their land by turning the initial disadvantage into an asset. For example, Thomas Cole declared that “the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness.”[18] The wilderness aesthetics thus formulated is responsible for the formation of the national park system for protecting wilderness areas by displacing indigenous Native American inhabitants.

These historical precedents underscore Simon Schama’s observation that “national identity ... would lose much of its ferocious enchantment without the mystique of a particular landscape tradition.”[19] They also demonstrate that the cultural tradition of a landscape aesthetic often leads to the creation of desired landscapes, such as a forest devoid of alien plant species, an invaded foreign soil filled with newly planted cherry trees, and seemingly wild areas of nature constructed by forcibly removing their native inhabitants. While these actions were primarily carried out by government officials and militaries, many citizens participated in these projects of world-making, even if unwittingly, by supporting the nationalistic agenda.

2.2. Environmental ramifications

Although environmental ethics is by now an established discipline, not enough attention has been paid to the environmental ramifications of our aesthetic taste, preference, and judgment.[20] For example, our attraction to scenic wonders, particularly in the United States under the aforementioned wilderness aesthetics, tends to neglect protecting unscenic lands, such as wetlands, and unattractive creatures, such as invertebrates and insects. The result can be devastating, as evidenced by the destruction of many wetlands. [21]

Aesthetics also plays a significant role in consumers’ purchasing decisions and their attitudes toward their possessions. Today in developed nations, the aesthetic interests generally work

against environmental concerns. A prime example is the throw-away mentality promoted by the industry practice of planned obsolescence regarding the products' style and fashion rather than functionality. Furthermore, our penchant for rare woods such as mahogany, smooth paper with no imperfections, and bright white laundered shirts is responsible for resource extraction and the use of harmful chemicals. Finally, significant amounts of fresh produce are wasted because of their 'deformed' shapes, such as two-legged carrots and cucumbers that are too curvy.

The cultivation and maintenance of a green lawn remains an American domestic practice, despite the well-publicized environmental costs of using water, fertilizer, and herbicide. Although mingled with a culturally- and historically- specific notion of the work ethic and civic duty, the primary motivation behind "keeping up with the Joneses" is aesthetic. The lawn has to be velvety-smooth and green, not brown, of uniform appearance and height, and without any weeds.

While the green lawn exemplifies an aesthetically desirable but environmentally harmful phenomenon, wind turbines and outdoor laundry hanging offer the opposite example. They are often objected to by the area residents, even including environmentally-minded ones, for their presumed eyesore effect. Thus, by virtue of seemingly innocuous and inconsequential attitudes, choices, and actions motivated by aesthetics, we unwittingly harm the environment and ourselves.

2.3. Cultivation of moral virtues

In contrast with the examples discussed so far, aesthetics can also be a powerful ally to improving the state of the world and the quality of life. As indicated by the example of cherry blossoms, Japanese culture has a rich tradition of mobilizing the power of the aesthetic. One example is the artistic expression of respect. Starting with the long-held garden-making tradition of arranging rocks and pruning plants by "obeying their request," the art of painting consists of capturing the "spirit of the object," flowers are arranged by "letting the flower express itself," and haiku is composed by "entering into" the subject matter with the "slenderness of mind."^[22] Such expression of respect toward objects can be found today in people's everyday life, ranging from the elegant protective supports of trees and shrubs made of bamboo and straw from the weight of snow and the beautiful packaging that honors both the materials used and the gift inside.

This aesthetic expression of the respectful attitude extends to other people. The most prominent and formalized practice is the art of the tea ceremony, in which the host makes all the aesthetic decisions guided by imagining what would delight the guests most.[23] The spatial design of both gardens and packaging takes into account the pleasure we derive from a gradually unfolding experience.[24] Japanese food serving, which consists of many dishes served at once, each highlighting the native characteristics of the individual ingredients, encourages the eater to be mindful and appreciative of each morsel, as well as inviting her to compose her own order of eating.

Although taken from Japanese art and aesthetics, these examples suggest a general idea that goes beyond this particular cultural practice. That is, certain moral virtues, such as respect and care for both humans and non-humans, can be embodied aesthetically through various sensuous qualities and their arrangements. This aesthetic expression of an other-regarding attitude toward objects and people also informs today's design profession. Many practitioners have become critical of the prevailing design process that does not pay enough attention and respect to users' and inhabitants' experiences in favor of making "artistic statements" and creating products "for the personal glory of its creator." [25] Instead, the alternative design process better reflects other-regarding attitudes, exuding qualities such as courtesy, responsiveness, humility, patience, and care, through a size appropriate for human scale, spatial arrangements that are sensitive to the bodily-oriented experience as well as to its temporal sequence, and design features that delight the senses. The resulting object not only provides a positive aesthetic experience but also has a practical benefit, such as health. In contrast to "the depressing emotional effects of ugly or oppressive environments," Berleant points out that "pleasant, delightful, or beautiful surroundings can shorten medical recovery time." [26] In contrast to 'sick' buildings, one critic points out that green architecture utilizes the benefits of sunlight, fresh air, breezes, rain water, and vegetation, "honors" the senses and is "comfortable, humanizing and supportive," "healthy and healing," "caring for the environment," "nourishing to the human being"; in short, it is where we feel "at home." [27] Humans are sensory as well as rational creatures, and designing and creating objects and environments that respect the users and inhabitants need to respond to their bodily experiences. Designer Victor Papanek thus quotes the Zen adept's teaching to "think with the whole

body” to remind us that “we need to come to our senses again.”[28]

The benefit of thoughtful design is not limited to health; it communicates a moral attitude affirming the importance of others’ experiences. Good design, Donald Norman writes, “takes care, planning, thought” and “concern for others.”[29] Similarly, Nigel Taylor points out that a building that appears to be put together thoughtlessly and carelessly, without regard to the users’ experience or its relationship to the surrounding, “would offend us aesthetically but, more than that, part of our offense might be ethical. Thus we might reasonably be angered or outraged, not just by the look of the thing, but also by the visible evidence that the person who designed it didn’t show sufficient care about the aesthetic impact of his building.” In contrast, when we detect a sign of care in the design of something, we experience both aesthetic and moral satisfaction, as “to care ... for how something looks, and thereby for the people who will look at it, is to exhibit not only an aesthetic but also a moral concern. Or rather, it is to exhibit an aesthetic attentiveness which is itself moral.”[30]

All the examples discussed above support Berleant’s insight that aesthetics has serious implications for the quality of life. That is, “every design decision affects people’s experience, and the aesthetic is a critical part of that experience. Instead of being thought of as a ‘frill,’ we begin to grasp the pervasiveness and importance of aesthetic factors.”[31] Furthermore, the reach of aesthetics is not limited to the physical environment; it extends to the design of our society. Hence, “we should ... not overlook the influence of aesthetic decisions on political life and on social institutions.”[32] Whether we are aware or not, aesthetics plays a crucial role in shaping our lives and the world.

3. Aesthetics’ role in world-making

It may be thought that the foregoing discussion clarifies the role of aesthetics only in the professional project of world-making, with most of us being its recipients, hence exempt from any responsibility. On the contrary, I would argue that we are all implicated in this world-making enterprise, although it is often unrecognized.

For example, in order to recognize and appreciate the aesthetic embodiment of moral virtues, moral and aesthetic sensitivity are required on the part of experiencing agents as well. That is, a beautifully and thoughtfully wrapped gift encourages respect and care in opening it. Similarly, when eating a Japanese meal, according to one writer on etiquette, the most important rule is

“to be grateful for the cook’s thoughtfulness and consideration ... and to humbly acknowledge the cook’s sincere heart while savoring the food ... Failure to do so would not only diminish the taste but also ignore the thoughtfulness of the host.”[33]

‘Thanks-giving’ for food is observed in many cultures, but this Japanese etiquette reminds us that food serving can be appreciated not only for the nourishment provided but also for the aesthetic manifestation of the cook’s care.

In contrast, consider people who gobble up carefully prepared and meticulously arranged foods without savoring each morsel, rip apart a beautifully packaged gift, and hurry through a garden path without paying attention to the unfolding vista and the stepping stones under their feet. We consider them to lack both aesthetic and moral sensibility. Their aesthetic life, we imagine, is not as rich as it could be and their moral life is equally impoverished because they miss the opportunity to gratefully accept and appreciate others’ care and thoughtfulness. If we take time and care in appreciating the expression of consideration and respect expressed aesthetically, such everyday experiences help cultivate respect, care, and thoughtfulness. Because these experiences are embedded in daily life and occur frequently, they can be a powerful though subtle vehicle for moral education.

Berleant’s notion of social aesthetics is helpful in this regard.[34] He calls for “acknowledging the presence of an aesthetic factor ... in environments of all sorts, including human situations and social relationships.”[35] He argues that civilized and humane human interactions share with aesthetic experience certain desiderata, such as acceptance of the other on their own terms, willingness to participate and reciprocate, and respect for the uniqueness of the other. In short, “ethical values lie at the heart of social aesthetics.”[36]

We usually regard issues related to human relationships and social interactions as ethical and political matters. At the same time, we attribute inter-personal moral virtues, such as care, thoughtfulness, considerateness, and respect, to a person’s character constituted by certain actions. What is often overlooked is that the communication of such virtues, or lack thereof, is accomplished through the aesthetic dimensions of physical objects, as well as of human interactions, such as the tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions and the like, which can range from rude to polite.[37] In other words, a person’s aesthetic sensibility, whether in providing or receiving an aesthetic experience, can be an important measure of his or her moral capacity. Marcia Eaton points out that, ultimately, there is

a “connection between being a person who has aesthetic experience and being a person who has sympathies and insights of a kind required for successful social interaction.”[38]

This brings us back to Nietzsche’s aesthetics and Japanese aesthetic tradition both of which, as we have seen, are concerned with aesthetics’ role in cultivating the practice of leading a good life. However, the personal project of creating a good life can succeed only in the context of a good society founded on morally- and aesthetically- guided human and social interactions. As such, aesthetic matters in our lives are neither frivolous superficiality nor, to borrow Yrjö Sepänmaa’s phrase, “high cultural icing.”[39] Nor are they confined to works of fine arts. Rather, promotion of and support for sensitively designed objects and environments, as well as aesthetically-minded civil human interactions, are indispensable ingredients of what Sepänmaa calls “aesthetic welfare.”[40] He points out that a true welfare state should guarantee not only “health care, education, and housing,” but also “an experiential aspect of welfare. An aesthetic welfare state should offer a beautiful living environment and a rich cultural and art life” because they provide “the basic conditions of life.”

If people were surrounded by poorly and wantonly designed environments and artifacts and subjected to inhumane social interactions, they will suffer from what Berleant variously calls “aesthetic offense,” “aesthetic damage,” “aesthetic deprivation,” “aesthetic harm,” and “environmental harassment,” or what Katya Mandoki calls “aesthetic violence” and “aesthetic poisoning.”[41] The cumulative consequences of such negative aesthetics include the utter neglect of care for an environment and people within, such as toxic pollution and a run-down, dilapidated neighborhood, as well as “the vulgar co-optation and commercialization of the natural landscape by billboards and other signage, and of public pedestrian space by canned music or private mobile phone conversation.”[42] The most extreme consequences include intentional acts to assault our aesthetic sensibility with the spectacular effects of terrorist acts or the deployment of the weapons of mass destruction.[43]

Berleant rightly emphasizes the importance of attending to such aesthetic offense and violence as a way of shedding light on social ills, particularly because “we may have learned to protect ourselves from offenses against the aesthetic quality of our world by the anodyne of sensory anaesthesia.”[44] However, it is important to expose ourselves to aesthetic pain because it provides a crucial gauge in determining what is not working in our society and world. Aesthetics’ “capability of identifying

negative aesthetic values” suggests “the possibility of becoming an incisive force in social criticism, a largely unexplored region of aesthetic activity but a potentially powerful one.”[45] Thus, whether positive or negative, “the quality of experience, understood most inclusively, is both the first and the final touchstone of the success of any political structure.”

4. The normative direction of aesthetics

This normative direction of aesthetics may be challenged on several fronts. First, although aesthetic judgments regarding art generate disagreements, those regarding everyday life matters are even more susceptible to diverse opinions, and it is more difficult to reach a consensus because one man’s trash is another man’s treasure. Second, what strikes us as negative aesthetics provides the best opportunity to sharpen our aesthetic sensibility by encouraging us to put aside its social implications. Thomas Leddy makes these points when discussing the roadside clutter and junkyard.[46] While these objects may be problematic from the social and environmental points of view, Leddy points out, and I agree, that artists are particularly “sensitive observers of our world and that they capture aesthetic features in their works that we might not normally notice.”[47] In light of a number of examples from contemporary art to illustrate this point, there is no good reason to close the door of aesthetics to a variety of approaches. I share his proposal “to clear a space for a form of aesthetic appreciation that is freer, more imaginative, and more in tune with important discoveries of modernist art than is allowed by current morally-centered views in aesthetics.”[48]

However, I would also argue that such an appreciation must co-exist with, rather than supplant, the response that includes moral and environmental concerns. In fact, Leddy may not disagree with this claim. That is, the junkyard *as a junkyard* should be experienced with all of its life values, though there may be no compelling reason to always do so. When practical concerns are at stake, for example, whether or not the environment should be cleaned up, it would seem irresponsible to ignore life values and appreciate the junkyard only for its varied textures and colors with an artistic eye.

In light of what I hope to have shown to be an overwhelming evidence of the power of the aesthetic, can we afford to ignore or deny that aesthetics plays a crucial role in directing our collective project of world-making? Regarding the potent power of aesthetics in determining the quality of life and state of the society and the world, sometimes for worse, we have two options. One is to separate the aesthetic from the other life

values, such as the political and environmental, and train us to act only on the basis of the latter, without being affected by any aesthetic considerations. So, for example, we should decide on the issues regarding wind turbines, laundry hanging, and lawns by reference to their respective environmental concerns only. By the same token, we should practice cultivating moral virtues through education, personal discipline, religious training, and the like. This way of promoting social, political, and environmental good may be supported by advocates of Kantian ethics who would want to appeal only to one's rationality in order to encourage moral conduct. The separation of the aesthetic and other life values will also be supported by those who object to what they regard as social engineering or "nudging" of our aesthetic life to conform to what Marcia Eaton calls "aesthetic ought."^[49] Furthermore, after considering the precedents where the powerful effect of aesthetics promoted dubious political ends as well as leading us away from an environmentally sound future, one may be inclined to choose this option and sever the tie between the aesthetic dimensions and the life values of things.

However, as Friedrich Schiller argued in his vision of the aesthetic education of man, humans are creatures who are affected by and operate on the sensible as well as on the rational level, and what really moves us to act is that which appeals to the sensible part. I believe this is recognized by psychologists, educators, propagandists, and advertizing agents, but curiously not sufficiently by aestheticians. Those who have been promoting a sustainable future also recognize the potential of aesthetics to serve this cause and argue for its utilization. To cite only one example, David Orr holds that "we are moved to act more often, more consistently, and more profoundly by *the experience of beauty* in all of its forms than by intellectual arguments, abstract appeals to duty or even by fear." Therefore, "we must be inspired to act by examples that we can see, touch, and experience," toward which we can develop an "emotional attachment" and a "deep affection."^[50] In addition, despite "the dangerous alignment of aesthetics and politics" in the past fascist regimes, Tansman reminds us that "the aestheticization of politics has a more positive lineage as well – an aesthetically grounded ethics that can evoke sympathy for one's fellows and ground freedom in the experience of beauty."^[51]

Against any lingering objection toward the "aesthetic ought," I would argue that a parallel direction exists in art aesthetics. Although there may not be one correct way to interpret and evaluate a work of art, within the all-too-familiar disagreements,

we do distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate appreciations of art, the latter being derived from highly idiosyncratic personal associations or not based upon sufficient or correct information. Except for die-hard relativists who believe that anything goes, we do seem to have some minimum requirements for interpreting, appreciating, and evaluating a work of art, without compromising the freedom to exercise one's imagination and creativity.

The ultimate reason for cultivating an appropriate kind of art appreciation is moral, rather than cognitive, and is best articulated by Dewey. According to him, the moral function of art is "to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing, tear away the veils due to wont and custom, (and) perfect the power to perceive." In other words, Dewey continues, "works of art are means by which we enter... into other forms of relationship and participation than our own." [52] Appreciating art on its, rather than our, own terms helps us cultivate this moral capacity for recognizing and understanding the other's reality through sympathetic imagination, thereby widening our horizons and ultimately laying the foundation for a civil society. Conceived this way, the value of aesthetics can be characterized as instrumental. It does not seem so far-fetched, then, to regard the nature of our aesthetic life in general as an important instrument for shaping the state of the society and the world and improving the quality of life. I thus agree with Eaton's claim that "aesthetic response ... is tied to a culture's moral order, and like emotions will be used to prescribe and proscribe the sort of life one has and leads." [53]

Finally, the alternative to aligning our aesthetic sensibility to a sustainable future, virtuous life, and a better society is not limited to severing the tie between the aesthetic sensibility and the rest of life. The other alternative, which already exists, is to adopt a laissez faire attitude and let the power of the aesthetic be used for any purposes or agenda and to ignore the cumulative and collective consequences of misdirected aesthetics in our lives. However, such a laissez faire approach has already been co-opted by those who seek to "nudge" or even legally coerce our aesthetic lives, who are guided by indifference to "aesthetic oughts." We have already looked at examples of this type of coercion, such as the prohibition against laundry hanging and the pressure to keep up with the Joneses' green grass. If we do not promote an alternative aesthetic ought, we are in effect supporting these existing aesthetic oughts by default.

It is true that the question of what constitutes a good life and a good society does not have uniform answers. Some of us are ardent defenders of free enterprise while others believe a socially-directed system is better. Furthermore, we disagree over whether it is better to be a dissatisfied Socrates than a satisfied pig. Leddy is thus correct in pointing out that a junkyard can be expressive of “non-conformity” or “nostalgia for things of another era,” rather than “waste” and “carelessness.” Indeed it is “expressive of many things in life” and “has many associations.”[54] On the one hand, aesthetics does not and cannot be expected to resolve these perennial debates. However, on the other hand, there are some basic facts and values that I believe can be accepted as common to humanity's flourishing, such as health, a sustainable future, a humane and civil society, and comfortable, stable, and welcoming environments, among others. The mobilization of aesthetic sensibility and strategy for better-world-making, Berleant points out, is “not a call for a rigid plan or a prescriptive order” because “humane environments require time to develop and they must reflect local needs, conditions, and traditions.”[55] He further states that “utopian thought ... has a strong aesthetic component. Utopianism is pervaded by moral values of social and environmental harmony and fulfillment. Its goal of facilitating living that is deeply satisfying through the fruitful exercise of human capacities is as aesthetic as it is moral.”[56] If aesthetics can be a powerful ally in enhancing these basic amenities for human flourishing, I cannot think of any good reason for not utilizing its powerful influence. At the same time, if aesthetics can be a formidable enemy, as some of the aforementioned examples have shown, then I believe that it is our collective responsibility to expose that role and oppose it. Aesthetics' significance, as Berleant declares, “lies not only in the ability... to serve as a critical tool for probing social practice but as a beacon for illuminating the direction of social betterment.”[57]

In conclusion, I believe we need to reclaim aesthetics' prominent place in the project of world-making and its inseparable connection with the rest of life. I salute Arnold Berleant for his long-standing, and still ongoing, effort to restore aesthetics to its rightful place in human life, and encourage others to join him in this re-making of aesthetics.

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Endnotes

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollindale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 429, emphasis added.

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, tr. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), p. 539, emphasis added.

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 164. Similarly, "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified" and "existence and the world seem justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon" (*The Birth of Tragedy* in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, tr. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), p. 52 and p. 141). For a specific example of aesthetically justifying life's occurrences, see p. 224 of *Gay Science*.

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, tr. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), p. 344 and *Gay Science*, p. 241.

[5] Makoto Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1967), p. 226.

[6] Nanbō Sōkei, "A Record of Nanbō," tr. Toshihiko and Toyo Izutsu, in *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), p. 155.

[7] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p. 59.

[8] Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), p. 164. Also see p. 157 and 158 of *Aesthetics of Environment*.

[9] Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World* (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2010), p. 119. Also see p. 154 of *Aesthetics of Environment*.

[10] Berleant, *Sensibility*, p. 8. Also see p. 175 of *Sensibility*, p. 10 of *Aesthetics of Environment*, and p. 20 of *Living in the Landscape*.

[11] Berleant, *Aesthetics of Environment*, p. 10.

[12] Berleant, *Sensibility*, p. 31. Also see p. 7.

[13] Since the publication of the previous version of this article in 2010, I have discussed most of the following examples in various publications, including *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and World-Making* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). I will not provide various references for these examples given there so as not to make this piece overly long.

[14] Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, p. 15.

[15] Gert Groening and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, "Some Notes on the Mania for Native Plants in Germany," *Landscape Journal*, 11, 2 (1992), 116-26; ref. on 122 and 123.

[16] Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) gives a thorough account of this military utilization of aesthetics regarding cherry blossoms, accompanied by a number of letters and diaries, as well as photographs, of Kamikaze pilots.

[17] Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 4, 12, and 3.

[18] Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," first appeared in the *American Monthly Magazine*, I (January 1836), included in *The American Landscape: A Critical Anthology of Prose and Poetry*, ed. John Conron (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 571.

[19] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 15.

[20] Since the original publication of this article, there has been an increased attention to the aesthetic in environmental ethics, most recently addressed in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art*

Criticism 76, 4 (2018) that is devoted to "The Good, the Beautiful, the Green: Environmentalism and Aesthetics."

[21] Ann Vileisis chronicles the sorry history of America's wetlands in *Discovering the Unknown Landscape: A History of America's Wetlands* (Washington, D. C.: Island Press, 1997).

[22] I discuss this point with respect to various Japanese arts in "Representing the Essence of Objects: Art in the Japanese Aesthetic Tradition," in *Art and Essence*, eds. Stephen Davies and Ananta Ch. Sukla (Westport: Praeger, 2003) and in "The Moral Dimension of Japanese Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65,1 (2007), 85-97. I also explore the similar aesthetics of Japanese packaging in "Japanese Aesthetics of Packaging," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57,2 (1999), 257-265.

[23] Such aesthetic decisions include the choice and arrangement of implements, body movements, preparation of the garden path and even the toilet, and cooking snacks and a small meal, to list only a few.

[24] For the aesthetics of unfolding space, see Fumihiko Maki's "Japanese City Spaces and the Concept of Oku," *The Japan Architect*, 265 (1970), 51-62 and Joy Hendry's *Wrapping Culture: Politeness, Presentation and Power in Japan and Other Societies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). Berleant also points out that "a city that engages the imagination requires the twists and turns we find so intriguing in medieval streets, the unexpected squares, fountains, vistas, restaurants, and shops tucked away in strange places, towers to climb, roof gardens and hilltop parks with panoramic views, street players, and public performances" (*Aesthetics of Environment*, p. 73).

[25] Victor Papanek, *The Green Imperative: Natural Design for the Real World* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1995), p. 203. Berleant also invokes moral concepts in describing a landscape design resulting from an unsuccessful collaboration with natural condition: "we can usually locate its source in careless, unconsidered, narrow, selfish, or deliberately exploitative actions" (*Living in the Landscape*, p. 82).

[26] Berleant, *Sensibility*, p. 169.

[27] David Pearson, "Making Sense of Architecture," *Architectural Review*, 1136 (1991), 68-70; ref. on 70.

[28] Papanek, *Green Imperative*, pp. 76 and 104.

[29] Donald A. Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), pp. 25 and 27.

[30] Nigel Taylor, "Ethical Arguments about the Aesthetics of Architecture," in *Ethics and the Built Environment*, ed. Warwick Fox (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 201-2 and 205.

[31] Berleant, *Sensibility*, p. 94.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

[33] Shiotsuki Yaeko, *Washoku no Itadaki kata: Oishiku, Tanoshiku, Utsukushiku (How to Eat Japanese Meals: Deliciously, Enjoyably, and Beautifully)* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1989), p. 12. The awkward, but literal, translation of the title is mine.

[34] Berleant, *Aesthetics and Environment*, Chapter 14: "Getting Along Beautifully: Ideas for a Social Aesthetics" and "Ideas for a Social Aesthetic" in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds. Andrew W. Light and Jonathan M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[35] Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, P. 39.

[36] Berleant, *Sensibility*, P. 95.

[37] Katya Mandoki develops a systematic account of these and many other aesthetic dimensions of our activities, institutions, and professions in *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

[38] Marcia Muelder Eaton, *Aesthetics and the Good Life* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989), p. 175.

[39] Yrjö Sepänmaa, "Aesthetics in Practice: Prolegomenon," in *Practical Aesthetics in Practice and in Theory*, ed. Martti Honkanen (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1995), p. 15.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 15. The next three passages are also from p. 15. Marcia Eaton also points out that "the idea that beautiful behaviour and beautiful surroundings go together is gaining credence." ("The Social Construction of Aesthetic Response," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 35, 2 (1995), 95-108; ref. on 105).

[41] The first three terms are from p. 164 of *Sensibility*, the fourth p. 74 of *Living in the Landscape*, the fifth p. 88 of *Aesthetics of Environment*. Mandoki's discussion on aesthetic violence is found throughout her *Everyday Aesthetics*.

[42] Berleant, *Sensibility*, p. 164.

[43] For a thought-provoking discussion of the aesthetics of terrorism, see Emmanouil Aretoulakis' "Aesthetic Appreciation, Ethics, and 9/11," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 6 (2008), accessed March 14, 2010. Berleant addresses the same subject in the

chapter on “Art, Terrorism and the Negative Sublime” in *Sensibility*.

[44] Berleant, *Aesthetics of Environment*, p. 15.

[45] Berleant, *Sensibility*, p. 88. The next passage is from p. 10.

[46] Thomas Leddy, “The Aesthetics of Junkyards and Roadside Clutter,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 6 (2008), accessed March 14, 2010.

[47] *Ibid.*, sec. 5. He provides a wealth of examples from contemporary art throughout this article.

[48] *Ibid.*, sec. 5.

[49] Marcia Muelder Eaton, *Merit, Aesthetic and Ethical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 176. The notion of “nudge” to assist better decision-making is discussed in *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness* by Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein (New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

[50] David Orr, *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 178-9, emphasis added, 185, 25, and 26. A parallel reminder is issued by Aldo Leopold who claims that “we can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love” and that it is “inconceivable... that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value” (*A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), pp. 251 and 261).

[51] Tansman, *Japanese Fascism*, p. 19.

[52] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), pp. 325 and 333.

[53] Eaton, “Social Construction,” p. 106.

[54] Leddy, “Junkyards,” sec. 2.

[55] Berleant, *Aesthetics of Environment*, p. 98.

[56] Berleant, *Sensibility*, p. 191.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

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