II

Significance of Everyday Aesthetics

In the last chapter, I have argued that everyday aesthetic concerns, preferences, and judgments cannot be adequately captured by either art-based or by special experience-based aesthetics. One may agree with this, but may still question the point of pursuing everyday aesthetics, believing that it concerns rather trivial, insignificant, and innocuous matters, not worthy of philosophical investigation. So what if we care about stains and wrinkles on our shirt, personal grooming, and the appearance of our properties and possessions? Does anything significant follow from these aesthetic matters? These concerns may at best contribute toward defining our self-image and personal relationships, but isn’t that as far as they go? Don’t these reactions indicate our preoccupation with superficial appearance, rather than with substantial and more important matters, such as political, moral, and social issues?

Art, on the other hand, deals with something much more serious and socially important, according to this line of argument. As characterized by Virginia Postrel in her discussion of style and substance, this view would hold that “appearances are not just potentially deceiving but frivolous and unimportant—that aesthetic value is not real except in those rare instances when it transcends the quotidian to become high art.” Art sometimes challenges us, changes our worldview, mobilizes us toward a certain action, nurtures valuable sensibilities like sympathy, generosity, and respect, and, last but not least, helps move a society in a certain direction. An aesthetic experience of it is also a complicated affair, unlike our unreflecting response to the sensuous surface of the objects, typical of

our everyday aesthetic life. It also occupies a special, standout place in our life by providing an enlightening, illuminating, sometimes uplifting, and sometimes devastating, insight into self, life, and the world, so that our life is never quite the same after that. But such is not the case with our preoccupation with a green lawn or a wrinkle-free shirt. Or so this argument would go.

I have announced in the last chapter that, while perhaps lacking in the capacity to facilitate an existentially profound insight or experience, and despite the absence of established discourses providing the context for our experience, our everyday aesthetic choices are neither uncomplicated nor insignificant. As I will argue in the next three chapters, once we start unearthing what is involved in seemingly straightforward and simple everyday aesthetic judgments, we realize that there is a surprising degree of complication surrounding them. This chapter will challenge the belief that our everyday aesthetic judgments and decisions are inconsequential. It is quite the contrary, and I will illustrate how everyday aesthetic tastes and attitudes often do lead to consequences which go beyond simply being preoccupied with and fussing with the surface, and that they affect not only our daily life but also the state of the society and the world.

The power of the aesthetic to influence, and sometimes determine, our attitudes and actions has actually been recognized and utilized throughout history and among different cultural traditions. Let me give a few examples. In the Western tradition, Plato was the first to acknowledge this power of the aesthetic, without which his advocacy for censoring arts would not make sense. In the non-Western tradition, we see Confucius as someone who also recognized the way in which both human beings and the society at large are molded by the proper observance of rites and rituals, which consist not only of appropriate behavior but also of music, attire, recitation, and the like. Nazi Germany’s promotion of certain music, literature, film, and even vegetation also comes to our mind. Contemporary scholarship on the modern Japanese intellectual history explores the connection between Japanese imperialism and the formation of national aesthetic, leading up to


2 For their systematic program of promoting native species while eliminating alien species (with an eerie analogy to their program with respect to human beings), see Gert Groening and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, "Some Notes on the Mania for Native Plants in Germany," Landscape Journal 112 (Fall 1992): 116–26.
World War II. This nationalistic aesthetic celebrated not only traditional Japanese arts but also its landscape, including the beauty of cherry blossoms that became a surprisingly potent symbol for war-time nationalism. A more recent example can be found in the photograph of three firefighters raising an American flag in the ruins of the World Trade Center, reminiscent of the famous iwó-jima photograph. Whatever our particular reaction to this photograph may be, there is no denying that it affected all of us deeply, along with other images of this catastrophe we could not help but witness. Its photographer, Thomas E. Franklin, himself states: "I've been surprised, all along, that people could react so strongly to a photograph."

In today's style-conscious consumer society, aesthetic considerations often influence our purchasing decisions. As one recent report on the status of design indicates: "Aesthetics now play a greater part in portraying the perceived status of a particular product as functional differences between models are reduced... The visual aspects of design have come to predominate as a means of attracting the consumer." Hence, "style" becomes the crucial factor determining the commercial success of a product. The concern for "style" extends not only to the goods themselves but also the way in which goods are marketed, ranging from their advertisement to the environment in which they are placed, defined by specific lighting, display strategy, color scheme, overall ambience, and even the appearance of the salespeople. This preoccupation with appearance and style extends to the perception of political candidates, such as their hairdo, attire, and gesture, in addition to their qualifications, leadership ability, political platform, and party affiliation.

3 Recent literature on this subject sheds light on the way in which the so-called typically and exclusively Japanese aesthetic values were purely a product of the concerted effort among the nationally bent intellectuals to cast the Japanese traditional culture in a superior light. For example, see Yumiko Iida's Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan: Nationalism as Aesthetics (London: Routledge, 2002) and Leslie Pincus' Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan: Kuki Shūichi and the Rise of National Aesthetics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

4 The most influential book on Japanese landscape that fueled Japanese nationalism is Shigesato Dōraku's Nihon Fukuinron (Theory of Japanese Landscape), first published in 1894. I will refer to its significance in Conclusion. As for the significance of the cherry blossoms, I will discuss it in Chapter IV.

5 "Photographer Says His Life Has Changed since 9/11," Providence Journal, 1 September 2002.


7 During the 2004 U.S. Presidential election, Time (19 July 2004) ran a tongue-in-cheek comparison of different presidents' and candidates' hair in "Hair to the Chief" (p. 20), while Providence Journal ran an article entitled "The Winner by a Hair" (13 July 2004), as well as "Is It Style Over Substance: Appearing Presidential Is the Goal" (30 September 2004). In addition, particularly among male political candidates, height is also an issue, to the point a shorter candidate (like Michael Dukakis) resorted to a platform behind a podium in a debate setting. Virginia Postrel also describes at length popular press (hence ultimately people's) preoccupation with Hilary Clinton's hairdo and the make-up worn by Katherine Harris, the former Florida Secretary of State who was responsible for overseeing the electoral process that created the controversial outcome of the 2000 presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore.

8 Perhaps the most noted critic is William Cronon for his "The Trouble with Wilderness: or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." included in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995).
against, rather than in support of, environmental values. This does not result from any consciously formulated agenda, unlike in the case of political or commercial utilization of the aesthetic that I mentioned before. It is rather derived from the lack of awareness on our part as to the environmental consequences of our everyday aesthetic tastes and judgments. The fact that everyday aesthetics has had generally negative environmental impact, however, also indicates a possibility that the same power of the aesthetic to influence our decisions can be utilized to promote a more positive environmental agenda, and I will delineate the tenets of such green aesthetics in Section 2.

1. The environmental significance of everyday aesthetics

1. Natural creatures

Let me begin with popular aesthetic taste regarding natural creatures. I believe that most people are attracted to creatures which are cute, cuddly, awesome, colorful, or graceful, but not to those that are slimy, nondescript, grotesque, or pesky. Empirical studies confirm this tendency in our aesthetic taste. One cross-cultural study indicates that people’s response to various creatures is based upon their “aesthetic appeal, greatly influenced by such considerations as color, shape, movement, and visibility.” This accounts for the general liking for large mammals and birds which are considered “aesthetically appealing,” but not for invertebrates and reptiles which are regarded as “aesthetically unattractive.” Responding to this general preference for cute, awesome, or colorful creatures, one issue of Time magazine, which contains both an article on the threatened status of sharks and another on the near extinction of cod off the North Atlantic coast, features a dramatic frontal photograph of a shark, but not of codfish, on its front cover. Similarly, an advertisement for DuPont’s double-hulled oil tankers consists of attractive visual images of a dolphin, baby seal, and whale, all presumably representing beneficiaries of those tankers. Even the best nature magazines or publications, one critic points out, invariably feature “those with the most vibrant hues; technicolor flora and fauna in arsenic greens, Titian reds, acid yellows, and shocking pinks.”

Popular culture also plays a role in formulating these aesthetic tastes, as pointed out by Marcia Eaton, such as many people’s attraction to deer as gentle creatures fostered by the Disney classic, Bambi. Furthermore, even among cute and cuddly creatures, another writer observes, we are attracted to “heart-warming pictures of koala, kangaroos, and polar bears teaching their children the wisdom of the wild, roughhousing during leisure moments, rubbing snouts like Eskimos, or fraternizing peacefully with other denizens of the forest primeval, images free of the grotesque business of scavenging for decomposed carrion, disemboweling prey, or mauling the blind, new-born pups of other species.”

The size, hence the visibility, of creatures, also matters, confirming Aristotle’s insight that an object has to be of a certain size, so that it can be taken in one view, to be aesthetically appreciable. Edward O. Wilson laments that “if human beings were not so impressed by size alone, they would consider an ant more wonderful than a rhinoceros” and points out that “when a valley in Peru or an island in the Pacific is stripped of the last of its native vegetation,... we are painfully aware (of that tragedy), but what is not perceived is that hundreds of invertebrate species also vanish.”

These popular aesthetic discriminations may appear to be of no great consequence: so what if we find sharks and rhinos more appealing than cod and ants? Actually a great deal is at stake. If we are aesthetically
attraction to certain creatures, we tend to care about their fate and are inclined to protect them, while we tend to remain indifferent to those creatures we do not find aesthetically appealing. Stephen Jay Gould puts it best when he complains of how "environmentalists continually face the political reality that support and funding can be won for soft, cuddly, and 'attractive' animals, but not for slimy, grubby, and ugly creatures (of potentially greater evolutionary interest and practical significance) or for habitats." His observation is confirmed by an empirical study which finds that "most Americans support protecting popular and aesthetically appealing species like the bald eagle, mountain lion, trout, and American crocodile, even when this protection might result in significant increases to the cost of an energy development project." We are thus familiar with the call for "save the whale" or "save the dolphin," but not "save the cod."

Indeed, there was a remarkable degree of public support for protecting the palia, a member of the honeycreeper family of birds indigenous to Hawaii, with stunning appearance due to "an unusually large bill, a golden yellow head and throat, and gray along its beak." In contrast, there was little public support for protecting snail darter, a two- to three-inch member of the minnow family, which was threatened to extinction by completion of TVA Tellico Dam. Observing this contrast, one commentator points out the "differing public perception of an attractive bird species as opposed to an unknown fish." Similarly, Eaton observes that "the Bambi syndrome," our tender emotion stirred by the sentimental image of all deer as Bambi, makes it difficult for forest managers "to convince the public that their tender emotion stirred by the sentimental image of all deer as Bambi makes it difficult for forest managers "to convince the public that their concern for the public that their concern should be severely decreased in some areas."

These aesthetic preferences affect not only the individuals' attitudes and resulting actions (such as supporting a certain environmental cause) but also the content of laws, according to some findings. For example, one study concludes that the "aesthetic enjoyment in part accounts for our sense that public discussions of species preservation most often cite large mammals—not rodents, insects, or lichen. This is sometimes reflected in law, as in the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which gives mammals such as whales, dolphins, and seals greater protection than fish, some of which are equally endangered." Qualifying for an endangered species also seems to be, at least partly, affected by the aesthetic considerations. Despite the rather remarkable increase in the number of bald eagles, thanks to the Endangered Species Act of 1973, from 417 nesting pairs in 1963 to more than 6,400 pairs today, it has only been de-listed recently. On the other hand, there are many other creatures that have not been included, such as "the lesser prairie chicken, the Mazama pocket gopher, the Zuni bluehead sucker and the beaver cave beetle," though they "stand in far greater peril than the bald eagle." Part of the reason seems to reflect the popular aesthetic taste which tends to dismiss those "more humble species—adorning no coins, atop no flagstaffs."

### ii. Landscape

Similar problems exist with respect to landscape. As I mentioned in the last chapter (2.iii), the general public tends to be more attracted to the unfamiliar and the spectacular, typified by the crown jewels of our national parks, such as Yellowstone and Yosemite, with their dramatic elevation, waterfalls, unusual geological formation, and thermal phenomena. The eighteenth-century legacy of the picturesque tradition, particularly in its most literal sense of a "picture-like" aesthetic, still seems to govern our taste. We tend to admire those landscapes which can be made into a nice picture (today often in the form of a photograph), but remain indifferent to other parts of nature which do not lend themselves to a nice pictorial composition due to a lack of sufficient complexity, variety, harmony, or eye-catching features. Even the staunch advocate of the creation of

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17 Kellert, p. 170, emphasis added.
18 Ibid., p. 167. In 1978, the Sierra Club and the Hawaiian Audubon Society entered a suit on behalf of this bird species, with palia as the plaintiff (Palia v. Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources) and the bird won. See p. 177 of Roderick Nash's The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) about this legal case.
19 The fascinating account of the political and legal maneuvers before and after the 1978 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in favor of the fish is given by Nash in pp. 177–9.
20 Kellert, p. 170, emphasis added. Kellert, however, also points out the significance of the snail darter case in the history of environmental consciousness. "The snail darter case may one day be viewed as a profound turning point in the evolution of a new consciousness toward the preservation of all life. It forced many to confront for perhaps the first time the problem of species loss, and it elevates the plight of an obscure species to unprecedented heights in questioning powerful economic and political interests." (p. 160)
21 Eaton, p. 182.
national parks, Frederick Law Olmsted, recognized this popular taste with growing apprehension. He warned the Yosemite Park Commission that “most Americans considered the grant a mere ‘wonder or curiosity,’” without appreciating “the preserve’s ‘tender’ aesthetic resources, namely the ‘fibres of noble and lovely trees and bushes, tranquil meadows, playful streams,’ and the other varieties ‘of soft and peaceful pastoral beauty.’” Indeed Olmsted’s worry foreshadows John Muir’s experience with two artists whom he encountered on Mt. Ritter in the High Sierras. Muir complained that the artists were satisfied only with a few scenic spots affording spectacular, startling views. However, other parts that attracted Muir, such as the autumn colors of the surrounding meadow and bogs, were “sadly disappointing” to the artists because they did not make “effective pictures.”

Aldo Leopold reiterates this concern by calling attention to people’s tendency to be attracted by dramatic, sublime, or picturesque landscapes while showing no interest in other more “boring” parts of nature: “there are those who are willing to be herded through ‘scenic’ places; who find mountains grand if they be proper mountains with waterfalls, cliffs, and lakes. To such the Kansas plains are tedious.” Desert areas will also appear monotonous and unworthy of aesthetic experience, “because of that under-aged brand of esthetics which limits the definition of ‘scenery’ to lakes and pine trees.” Indeed one empirical study on people’s landscape preference confirms Leopold’s description of people’s taste; according to it, “prairie scenes were invariably rated aesthetically poor.”

I shall refer to this landscape aesthetics that favors scenic landscapes “scenic” aesthetics. As with our taste regarding various creatures, this scenic aesthetics has serious consequences. In the words of one critic, scenic aesthetics “blinds us to the subdelty of the browns and grays of our everyday landscapes, which look positively sallow next to the fly-traps and orchids that have become the botanical centerfolds of Sierra and Natural History.”

As a result, we care about the fate of the scenic wonders of national parks and oppose any activities that would “disfigure” their appearance. We protest loudly against logging of redwoods or any constructions that might compromise the performance of the Old Faithful. On the other hand, other landscapes which are generally considered aesthetically unattractive, such as wetlands and prairie, have historically been vulnerable to abuse and destruction, because we don’t care as much about what happens to them. The research that found people’s low aesthetic rating of prairie concludes by stating, “any use of prairie would be acceptable, because no one cares about viewing the prairie.” The sorry history of what happened to wetlands, not only in the United States but also globally, indicates that many people believe that wetlands should be made more “productive” by draining, filling, and paving. Their perceived lack of any aesthetic value contributes to the public’s eager attitude toward such transformation. Aldo Leopold thus warns: “We console ourselves with the comfortable fallacy that a single museum-piece will do, ignoring the clear dictum of history that a species must be saved in many places if it is to be saved at all.”

Even with “a museum piece” like national parks, the problematic consequences of scenic aesthetics still linger. The American institution of the national park, first of its kind in the world, was established exclusively motivated by the perceived need for protecting scenic wonders, but not ecological integrity, from cultivation and development. As such, protection of unsenic lands for ecological reasons historically met with resistance and sometimes even with ridicule. For example, the Everglades was not designated as a national park until 1947, despite the nearly twenty-year effort by concerned scientists, politicians, and citizens. It was initially ridiculed as merely a swamp with “mighty little that was of special interest, and absolutely nothing that was picturesque or beautiful,” leading even someone considered at the time to be one of America’s foremost spokesmen for...
wildlife conservation to declare: "it is yet a long ways from being fit to elevate into a national park, to put alongside the magnificent array of scenic wonders that the American people have elevated into that glorious class."33

Another ramification of scenic aesthetics associated with national parks is their boundary. The boundary of Yellowstone, for example, was initially determined primarily to protect scenic wonders, such as geysers and thermal phenomena, without regard to its ecological integrity. As a result, habitats for native animals and the quality of the groundwater feeding into parkland, for example, have been compromised by development adjacent to the park boundary.

Finally, there is the problem of fire, natural or prescribed, in national parks. Until the resurrection of prescribed burning in 1970, the policy was to suppress it. It is partly because of a misconception that national parkland such as the Yosemite was an untouched wilderness, sometimes requiring the displacement of its native residents. In fact, the redwood forest had been managed by Native Americans for centuries, including periodic burning that helped its growth while controlling the growth of underbrush that will act as fagots for a massive fire.34 Another reason for prohibition against forest fire was the popularly held scenic aesthetic, represented by the following 1929 statement by a respected conservationist that fire "without a doubt" was "the greatest threat against the perpetual scenic wealth of our largest National Parks."35

Overall, scenic aesthetics is vulnerable to those projects, like logging, mining, and drilling, which promise not to disturb the scenic beauty of the area by, for example, carrying out the operations away from our field of vision as drivers and hikers.36 Furthermore, it can be subversively used to support major modifications of the land, such as construction of dams, by showing the dramatic increase in scenic beauty, sometimes even illustrated by a touched up photo, as in the case of the Hetch Hetchy in Yosemite.37 Thus, our prevalent scenic landscape aesthetics has consequences not only regarding the fate of unscenic lands but also regarding our protection and management of scenic lands.38

iii. Built environment and consumer goods

Another way in which a commonly held aesthetic value conflicts with ecological values regards the built environment and consumer goods. One prime illustration is the popular obsession with green, velvety-smooth, weeds-free lawns. The quintessential example of this aesthetic ideal is the conventional golf courses which suffer from the so-called "Augusta National Syndrome," named after the Georgia golf course that hosts the Masters tournament each spring. Its televised appearance sets an unattainable standard, consisting of "wall-to-wall green fairways and blooming flowers wherever you look," as well as ponds which are "dyed with aquatic colorant, turning them a deep turquoise."39 Many homeowners in the United States try their best to emulate a similar look for their property by investing inordinate amount of time, energy, and resources. The environmental cost of this toxin- and energy-intensive, resource-guzzling endeavor is by now well-documented, raising a growing concern among environmentalists as well as landscape designers.

Furthermore, people's aesthetic aspirations and expectations often dictate the particular appearance of various consumer goods, determining the kinds of resources and manufacturing processes needed for the desired results. For example, one reason for the destruction of the rainforest is driven by the consumers' appetite for rare wood, such as mahogany, for furniture. The environmental cost of this toxin- and energy-intensive, resource-guzzling endeavor is by now well-documented, raising a growing concern among environmentalists as well as landscape designers.

Cited by Runte, p. 131. The second passage is also from p. 131.


33 Runte, National Parks, p. 201. An interesting aesthetic discussion of forest landscape management, including fire, given from a practitioner's point of view, can be found in Paul H. Goldster, "An Ecological Aesthetic for Forest Landscape Management," Landscape Journal 18:1 (Spring 1990): 34-64.

34 A very controversial discussion regarding federal agencies' "visual resource management" that includes such a "deception" is given by Denis Wood in "Unnatural Illusions: Some Words About Visual Resource Management," Landscape Journal 7:2 (Fall 1988): 193-205.


36 One may question the relevance of such scenic beauty when discussing everyday aesthetics, because I am claiming that such places are for the most part not everyday environment for most people. Furthermore, scenic landscapes typically provide memorable aesthetic experiences, standing out from general flow of experiences: My point in discussing scenic aesthetic is twofold: (1) it exemplifies the general neglect of most people's everyday environment which is not scenic, and (2) various environmentally problematic consequences of aesthetic aesthetics were generally unforeseen.

of virgin wood. Similarly, soy ink or vegetable dye looks dull compared to the vibrant, vivid colors produced by chemically based inks and dyes. Objects made with salvaged materials, reused products, or recycled parts may be amusing and possibly innovative, but they remain curio items not suitable for mass acceptance by consumers at large. Even the production of so-called “natural” fibers, such as cotton and wool, involves extensive finishing processes that utilize large amounts of energy, water, and a number of toxic chemicals, in order to meet the consumers’ demand for a particular appearance and feel of the fabric, such as absence of impurity, easy dyeability, smooth luster, and softness to touch.40 Our care of fabrics is also motivated by aesthetic considerations and is not without environmental ramifications. We want to keep the color of white fabric bright white, and the washing detergent manufacturers meet our demand by putting bleach and “optical brightener,” which is essentially a fluorescent dye, in their product. The environmentally conscientious people, on the other hand, have resigned themselves to “the reduction in standards from the ‘whiter-than-white’ effect we have come to expect from conventional washing powders to the noticeably less-than-white we get from bleach-free, environmentally friendly ones.”41

Finally, there is still a strong resistance to green architecture not only because of the initial high cost but also due to the assumption that ecological value compromises the aesthetic value of such projects. This assumption is partly justified by the initial stage in the development of green architecture which, many point out, promoted environmental benefits at the cost of the aesthetic, an understandable move because of the previously exclusive concern with aesthetics regardless of environmental impact. The following statement by Ian McHarg in his manifesto on “design with nature” is typical of this attitude: “ecology provides the indispensable basis for landscape architecture and regional planning.”42 According to William McDonough and Michael Braungart, both ecological design practitioners, such exclusive emphasis on the ecological often resulted in built structures that address “environmental ‘solutions’ in isolation, tacking new technology onto the same old model or coming up with giant solar collectors that overheated in the summer. The resulting buildings were often ugly and obtrusive.”43 A case in point is the recent ordinance in the city of Los Gatos, CA, that cracks down on solar panels placed on top of buildings in ways that “threaten[s] to make their upscale Silicon Valley village an ugly place.”44 Though fully cognizant and supportive of the environmental values of solar panels, not to mention the state tax benefit, the city officials cite the pursuit of “architectural excellence” as the rationale behind their ordinance.

A similar aesthetic objection to what many consider an environmentally desirable structure is the response to wind power facilities. Though the initial problems of noise pollution, bird kills, unreliability, and frequent loss of blades were overcome with improved technology, aesthetic objections still persist, even in a place with special affection for windmills like the Netherlands.45 The most recent controversy is the Capewind project to construct 130 wind turbines, 260 feet each, in the middle of Nantucket Sound off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Because of their full visibility, they are invariably decried as “marring,” “spoiling,” “ruining,” and “intruding on” the otherwise pristine scenic vista, creating an “eyesore.” The extent of this objection can be gauged by the fact that many of the opponents are self-proclaimed environmentalists, like Robert Kennedy, Jr., who fully embrace the environmental value of wind power.46

These examples are evidence of what one writer claims is “the perceived incompatibility between aesthetics and wholesomeness”47 among consumers; “the tension between aesthetics and morality lingers on in the conviction that that which tastes good, that which is delicate to the touch and pleasing to the eye, is necessarily also good for the world around us.”48 According to a number of writers, concern with aesthetics initially took a back seat to concern with environmental impact, and only recently have ecologically oriented designers begun to take aesthetic considerations into account.49


41 Whiteley, p. 92.


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to the eye, cannot be good for you.” Indeed, one designer’s research on his profession found that “only 15% of those interviewed saw any strong connection between aesthetics and environmental issues in design, while 70% saw virtually no connection at all.” He concludes from this that “largely ignored until now in discussions about environmental issues and design... is the area of aesthetics.” Advertising for green products often downplays their ecological value, for fear that emphasizing it may give an impression of their aesthetic inferiority. For example, a new sustainable floor-covering called Solcnium produced by Interface “won’t even be marketed as an environmental product,” while a vegetarian restaurant is praised for the taste of its food which states: “with food this good, it’s easy to forget all the dishes... are strictly vegetarian.”

The unfortunate outcome of the popular penchant for vivid colors, smooth texture, and sickle appearance in consumer goods is that it discourages designers and manufacturers from producing green objects made with sustainable resources and environmentally benign manufacturing processes, which promote, rather than jeopardize, the health of the environment and ultimately of ourselves. A design critic, Nigel Whiteley, admits that “the actions of manufacturers, marketers, designers and advertisers are ideologically loaded—and overwhelmingly often that ideology runs counter to the interests of the environment and is, therefore, in the longer run also counter to human interests” and part of the reason for this anti-environmental ideology is the green products’ perceived lack of aesthetic appeal, a significant factor for commercial success.

The examples enumerated in this section testify to what I call “the power of the aesthetic,” the contribution aesthetics makes in shaping the world and ultimately our life. This power of the aesthetic is for the most part unrecognized when it comes to our everyday aesthetic judgments unless they lead to a standout aesthetic experience. Our attraction to cute animals, green lawn, and bright white shirt normally do not induce such aesthetic experiences. The collective and cumulative environmental ramifications of such seemingly innocuous aesthetic tastes and preferences, therefore, go unnoticed, or at best underestimated. Thus, this section concludes with some rather bad news. Not only are we unaware of the environmental effects of such everyday aesthetics but also those effects generally seem to work against environmental agendas. However, is the situation then hopeless?

2. Green aesthetics

The bad news of the last section fortunately also seems to suggest the possibility of some good news. That is, if the power of the aesthetic has had environmentally negative consequences, isn’t it possible to redirect the power toward a more positive end?

A skeptic may respond that we cannot do anything about our aesthetic taste and preference because nobody can impose that on us. What could be imposed upon us, however, is ecological literacy. We should be willing to be made aware of the ecological implications of our actions through scientific, but not aesthetic, persuasion. We can come to appreciate the ecological value of swamps and snail darter, although a swamp is still an ugly muck and a snail darter a nondescript fish. By the same token, we can learn the ecological price of maintaining a green lawn and bleaching white shirts, but the aesthetic attraction to them remains the same. This strategy is similar to appreciating the nutritional value of bran or the medicinal value of cod liver oil without liking their taste, or recognizing the harm of high-calorie, high-fat food while loving its (sinful) taste.

In response to this skepticism, I shall first argue why it is not sufficient to develop ecological literacy alone. Then I shall also illustrate how it is possible to change popular aesthetic tastes for serving a certain social agenda.

i. The power of the aesthetic

Nobody would deny the importance of increasing our ecological literacy so that we become more aware of the ramifications of our actions. Indeed one empirical study confirms that the degree of positive attitude toward
invertebrate species corresponds to the extent of education and knowledge gained about them. However, such knowledge by itself may not be sufficient to effect changes in our attitudes and actions. Our aesthetic reactions can play a rather important role in this regard.

Aldo Leopold is one of the foremost environmentalists who were keenly aware of the crucial role played by the aesthetic in promoting land ethic. His aesthetic and land ethic are inseparable. His plea for the cultivation of ecological literacy through studying natural history and ecology did not simply end there; he thought it necessary to transport the bookish knowledge gained by such studies to our actual perception and experience of nature. His well-known “key-log” of land ethic thus states: “Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right... A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community,” and he repeatedly emphasizes the importance of promoting the “perception” of the land.

Leopold’s reason for emphasizing the aesthetic dimension of his land ethic is a rather contra-Kantian view that the respect and resultant protective response toward an object (such as the land) are not forthcoming without some degree of attraction, attachment, in short, the feeling of love. He 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.”

Now, I think it is theoretically possible to develop an ecologically sensitive and responsible attitude toward land without cultivating our aesthetic attraction and affectionate attachment to it. After all, we can and do develop a respect for an abstract concept or entity, such as freedom, peace, and a nation, by appealing exclusively to our rational faculty, the only proper faculty for Kantian ethics. However, even with regard to these entities, it is noteworthy that they are often represented by concrete symbols, such as a dove with an olive branch, a bald eagle, a flag, a national anthem, or the Statue of Liberty. These symbols are powerful; they make it easy for us to cultivate a respectful, affectionate attitude, inclining us toward certain decisions and actions. Similarly, except for a diehard Kantian hero, most of us will be much more predisposed to act responsibly and respectfully regarding nature or an artifact if we find them to be aesthetically positive. Without such an aesthetic attraction and emotional attachment, cultivating a respectful attitude toward the land would be, if not theoretically impossible, a hard-sell psychologically and pragmatically.

If Leopold’s emphasis on the importance of the aesthetic is a plea to develop an ecologically minded sensibility when experiencing nature, a parallel reminder is given to the designers and creators of the built environment by Joan Nassauer in her discussion of “cultural sustainability.” While promoting ecologically sustainable landscape design, she also calls attention to the importance of people’s aesthetic reaction toward it. She points out that if people find a landscape attractive and aesthetically appealing, they tend to cherish, maintain, care for, and protect it, rendering it “culturally sustainable.”

Landscapes that attract the admiring attention of human beings may be more likely to survive than landscapes that do not attract care or admiration. Survival that depends on human attention might be called cultural sustainability. Landscapes that are ecologically sound, and that also evoke enjoyment and approval, are more likely to be sustained by appropriate human care over the long term. People will be less likely to redevelop, pave, mine, or ‘improve’ landscapes that they recognize as attractive. In short, the health of the landscape requires that humans enjoy and take care of it.

Speaking of green architecture, Christopher Hawthorne makes the same point. It is not enough for a green building to satisfy sustainability requirements; it also needs to be aesthetically satisfying, because “if a building is beloved, it will be maintained and preserved—and there is nothing more environmentally friendly than longevity.”

Larry Shiner pointed out that the same criticism of Kantian morality based solely on rationality is given by Friedrich von Schiller. Schiller’s primary concern seems to call attention to the power of art to affect desire, sentiment, and passion, which in turn can inspire people to act according to the principles of reason. I believe his theory regarding the power of art can also be extended to the aesthetic dimensions of nature and artifacts.


A similar point is made by David Orr who also emphasizes the crucial role that aesthetics should play in promoting a sustainable world. He claims, “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.” That is, “we must be inspired to act by examples that we can see, touch, and experience,” toward which we develop “emotional attachment” and “deep affection.” Indeed, in tracing the history of the American land trust movement, Richard Brewer acknowledges that, despite limitations, “the aesthetic argument is probably the most persuasive argument a land trust can use for most of its land projects.”

However, even if we agree with Leopold and others that we must cultivate an everyday aesthetic sensibility which helps promote, rather than thwart, environmental agendas, what is its feasibility? Is it simply wishful thinking and do environmental issues ultimately need to be addressed exclusively by non-aesthetic means? Or is it possible to engage in a kind of social engineering regarding everyday aesthetics? Let me first provide a historical precedent where people’s aesthetic sensibility was engineered to serve a particular social goal. The history of American landscape aesthetics, though decidedly not developed to nurture ecological sensibility, does illustrate that our aesthetic taste can be guided to serve a specific social agenda.

ii. Landscape aesthetics in the United States

As many scholars have documented, early American settlers’ attitude toward what appeared to them as uncultivated “wilderness” was negative, partly because of the overwhelming obstacles to be overcome for sheer survival. The other factors contributing to this negative attitude toward wilderness came from the European intellectual tradition at the time. Raw nature was regarded as worthless “waste” until it was cultivated and worked on by humans, John Locke being one of the most vocal proponents of this view. This utilitarian consideration affected the prevailing European aesthetic taste until the development of the new aesthetic categories of the sublime and the picturesque during the course of the eighteenth century. Geometrical regularity, orderliness, and neatness, all characteristic of cultivated land, such as farms and orchards, were considered more beautiful than disorderly, chaotic, messy wilderness.

When survival in the wilderness was no longer a pressing concern, Americans’ attitude toward their land became more positive. However, in an interesting parallel to the earlier attitude toward the (literally) uncultivated land, Americans had to contend with another sense in which their land was uncultivated: lack of associations. Nineteenth-century American landscape appreciation borrowed extensively from the prevailing European aesthetic theory, an outgrowth of an aesthetics of the picturesque and the foundation of romanticism, which located the aesthetic value of an object in the series of associated ideas it triggers. The following claim by Archibald Alison, a late eighteenth-century British aesthetician, best characterizes this associationist aesthetic theory: “when any object, either of sublimity or beauty, is presented to the mind, I believe every man is conscious of a train of thought being immediately awakened in his imagination, analogous to the character or expression of the original object.” For example, according to Alison, the valley of Vaucluse (residence of Petrarch), the field of Agincourt, and the Rubicon derive their respective aesthetic value from historical associations, while other places may be “embellished and made sacred by the memory of Theocritus and Virgil, and Milton and Tasso.” These associations, whether historical or literary, beautify the landscapes which “themselves may be little beautiful.”

European landscapes, on this aesthetic theory, were thus easily appreciable because of the long human history associated with them. American landscapes, on the other hand, according to the nineteenth-century interpretation, were considered devoid of equivalent associations. This comparison created a great deal of anxiety and a sense of inferiority complex.
among the nineteenth-century American intellectuals. To cite only a few examples, Thomas Cole, a noted nineteenth-century painter particularly known for his landscapes, claims that many people judge American scenery to be inferior to European scenery because of the former’s “want of associations, such as arise amid the scenes of the old world.” 64 Similarly, Sarah Hale, a writer, laments that American landscape on the whole is dull to our fancy because of “the barrenness, the vacancy, painfully felt by the traveler of taste and sentiment,” which “arises from the want of intellectual and poetic associations with the scenery he beholds.” 65

The American landscape appreciation familiar to us today came out of the various strategies proposed as remedies for this alleged lack of associations. One was to provide such associations by creating various stories attributable to specific landscapes. The literary works of Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper were especially instrumental in establishing some associations for American scenery in order to make it “the great theater of human events.” 66 The second strategy was to refer people’s imagination to the potential of future economic development of the site. The scenery may be uncultivated, primitive, uncouth, and rough at the moment. However, looking at such scenery, Thomas Cole claims: “the mind’s eye may see far into futurity. Where the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten; on the gray crag shall rise temple and tower—mighty deeds shall be done in the now pathless wilderness; and people yet unborn shall sanctify the soil.” 67

Where the Americans could claim superiority of their landscape over European landscape, however, was considered to be in the immensity, both temporal and spatial, of the former. By the expansion of the notion of historical associations to include natural history, American landscape can boast advantage over European human history. For example, Clarence King wrote that the Sierra redwoods “began to grow before the Christian era” and Horace Greeley stated that the trees “were of very substantial size when David danced before the ark, when Solomon laid the foundation of the Temple, when Theseus ruled in Athens, when Aeneas fled from the burning wreck of vanquished Troy.” 68

This temporal immensity associated with American landscape is matched by spatial enormity. The Niagara Falls are stupendous, unparalleled by any falls worldwide; the summits, gorges, and falls of the Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada supercede those found in Europe, the Alps in particular; various natural curiosities situated in Yellowstone, such as geysers and hot springs, surpass similar phenomena found elsewhere in size and might. In 1857, Albert Richardson declared that “in general natural curiosities and wonders, all other countries combined fall far below it.” 69

The final strategy for establishing the unique and superior feature of American landscapes was rather subversive, but effective: to turn this supposed disadvantage of lacking associations into a virtue: the celebration of American wilderness precisely because of their untouched status, both literally and conceptually. Roderick Nash claims that Washington Irving and Charles Fenno Hoffman, the first editor of the Knickerbocker Magazine, were instrumental in instilling the idea that “America’s wilderness constituted an advantage over other countries,” leading one traveler familiar with the Alps to declare that “the Alps... cannot... present a scenery more wild, more rugged, more grand, more romantic, and more enchantingly picturesque and beautiful, than that which surrounds (Lake Tahoe).” 70 In short, in the words of Cole, “the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness.” 71

Indeed, landscape paintings, particularly of Western wilderness, by such artists as Albert Bierstadt, Frederick Church, and Thomas Moran, emphasized the wild immensity of untouched land by dramatic composition and lighting, as well as the sheer immensity of their canvases. In addition, though originally intended as documentary photos to record a governmental survey project, works by William Henry Jackson and Carleton Watkins

71 Cole, *p. 571.*
captured and popularized the scenic wonders of the West, in particular Yellowstone and Yosemite. The images of these landscapes became even more recognizable as illustrations and covers of widely circulated books and magazines, including *Picturesque America*. Today these landscapes provide popular images of sparkling streams, fall colors, apple blossoms, and the scenes used as backgrounds in cigarette advertisements and calendars.72

All of these modes of appreciating American landscape thus formed a part of a cultural project to define the New World's own identity, in particular by distinguishing itself from the Old World, to which the young nation was indebted in many respects, including aesthetic sensibility. This self-imposed pressure to come up with what is distinctly American about its landscape and what makes it superior to the rest of the world is one factor that contributed to the formation of the national park system. It is no accident that the first areas to be designated as national parks, Yosemite and Yellowstone, are distinguished by the size, age, and might of their geological wonders, as well as their (presumed) wilderness.73

This development of American landscape aesthetics underscores Simon Schama's observation that "national identity... would lose much of its ferocious enchantment without the mystique of a particular landscape tradition."74 What is most important for my present purpose, however, is that this case illustrates the way in which people's aesthetic tastes and judgments can be guided by a social/cultural agenda and the way in which their power to affect our attitude and resultant actions has been utilized.

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72 Ted Relph, "To See with the Soul of the Eye," *Landscape*, 33 (1979), p. 38. Nigel Whiteley, citing the following 1932 remark by Roy Sheldon and Egmont Arens, co-authors of *Consumer Engineering: A New Technique for Prosperity*, points out that this American wilderness aesthetics spills over to its consumerism, described as "The American Way": "Europe, without our enormous natural resources, whose land has been tilled for centuries and whose forests are hand-planted state parks, is naturally conservative in its philosophy of living. But on this side of the Atlantic the whole set-up is different. Not only are our resources greater; they are unsounded, unmeasured, many of them almost untouched...In America today we believe that our progress and our chances of better living are no accident that the first areas to be designated as national parks, Yosemite and Yellowstone, are distinguished by the size, age, and might of their geological wonders, as well as their (presumed) wilderness.73

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This historical precedent then supports the possibility for promoting a green agenda through aesthetic engineering. In what follows, I would like to make a case for what Marcia Eaton calls an "aesthetic ought"; that is, "creating sustainable environments necessitates asking not just what people do find beautiful but what they should find beautiful."75

iii. Green aesthetics—nature

First, then, how do we make unscenic aspects of nature aesthetically attractive in our experience? One strategy is to bring out the picturesque, scenic, or dramatic surface qualities in unscenic parts of nature that are normally inaccessible to human perception. Microscope, varied lighting, and photographs with wide-angle or telescopic lens help make the invisible visible. Time-lapse photographs and films also capture phenomena that take place over a period of time that is too long for us to experience.

We can also learn to see scenic beauty in unscenic creatures and landscapes with the help of artistic means. For example, photographs of wetland, desert, and prairie featured in cards and calendars issued by environmental organizations, such as the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and the Nature Conservancy, depict them in an attractive manner through strategic framing, lighting, and enhancement. When we appreciate actual landscapes through such an artistic lens, we are acting similarly to the eighteenth-century European travelers in search of the picturesque beauty, whose landscape appreciation was directed toward "improved" versions of actual sites, either reflected in the Claude glass or depicted in their own sketches and drawings à la Claude Lorraine or Salvator Rosa.

Learning to see scenic beauty in unscenic creatures and landscapes with the help of artistic means, however, may backfire. That is, composition in visual arts is by necessity selective and arranged, never an exact duplicate of the actual object. Hence, if we learn to appreciate unscenic parts of nature through an artistic lens, it is possible that we will be disappointed to discover that the actual unscenic nature fails to meet the expectation created by its artistic presentation. For example, even with respect to scenic landscapes, how many of us had at least one experience of building up an expectation through postcards, guidebooks, and posters, only to feel disillusioned when we finally get to see the actual landscape (although a sense of satisfaction of

75 Eaton, p. 176.
seeing the real thing at last may compensate for the disappointment? Maybe the weather condition is not optimal, as depicted in the photographs, so the vista is obscured and lighting is not as dramatic. Or, the strategic framing may have avoided the inclusion of distracting items, such as a parking lot, souvenir shops, and a nearby highway that are clearly within the actual view. Indeed, Anne Godfrey, both a landscape architect and a photographer, testifies to this manipulated experience of a landscape offered by commercial photographs. She confirms that "through simple devices such as framing, viewpoint, composition, shutter speed, and the use of lighting and filters, the photographer orchestrates his or her idealized image of a place." Specifically, she states: "I crop out anything poorly managed or worn and any ugly views. To obtain such flattering views, I will put myself in awkward positions: perching on top of tables, benches, and my tailgate, or leaning out windows." The scene captured from such awkward viewpoints may not be possible for the viewers on site to experience. Furthermore, according to her, the presence of people is generally shunned in landscape photography. Even without such a framing strategy, it may be the case that our experience is distracted by non-visual elements, such as the noise of traffic, low-flying sightseeing airplanes, and snowmobiles, in addition to the aroma of barbecue from nearby campground or the unpleasant smell coming from overflowing garbage cans.

Moreover, this strategy contains a missed opportunity for education. That is, if our popular aesthetic taste is perpetuating ecologically unenlightened perception and ultimately actions, a new aesthetic sensibility should be cultivated to educate us about the consequences of our aesthetic preferences. As a number of thinkers advocate, starting with Leopold's land aesthetic, green aesthetics must be scientifically informed, rather than exclusively directed toward the sensuous surface. Green aesthetics has to include conceptually based aesthetic value, variously described as "thick" sense, "expressive 'beauty,'" "life values," or "serious" appreciation, which then informs the appreciation of the object's sensuous surface.}

I take it that the necessity of the conceptual in determining the aesthetic qualities and artistic meanings of works of art has been established and the formalist theory has been largely discredited, except for its value in calling attention to the sensuous. For example, Kendall Walton's notion of the "categories of art" demonstrates the necessity of placing a work of art in its proper category, determined by extra-sensory factors like its historical context and the artist's intention, in attributing "the correct" aesthetic qualities, such as dynamic, elegant, coherent, and serene. Arthur Danto's theory of "the artworld" also invokes such necessity in situating an object in the artworld so that we can then proceed to interpret its meaning and expressive properties. Perceptually indiscernible objects can be distinguished by their membership, or lack thereof, to the artworld, which can be determined only by reference to conceptual considerations.

Similarly, the experience of natural objects necessarily invokes the cognitive, first for experiencing them "as nature" rather than a well-crafted fake, and for determining the "correct" aesthetic properties. Walton makes an analogy between the category of art and that of nature by pointing out that our appreciation of a baby elephant as "charming, cute, delicate, or puny" is dependent upon the regular size of elephants that we are familiar with. "To people who are familiar not with our elephants but with a race of mini-elephants, the same animal may look massive, strong, dominant, threatening, lumbering, if it is large for a mini-elephant." While the involvement of such cognitive factors in the aesthetic appreciation of nature may be accepted by many, what is most hotly contested in the aesthetics of nature is the degree and content of the conceptual that is deemed necessary. The debate usually focuses on whether scientifically guided or informed nature appreciation is the only or the most appropriate or correct appreciation of nature. In the context of my discussion here, appreciation of natural environment. See Allen Carlson, "On Aesthetically Appreciating Human Environments," *Philosophy & Geography* 4:1 (2003), p. 18, and Ronald Hepburn, "Trivial and Serious in Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," included in *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts*, eds. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

which is to explore the tenets of green nature aesthetics, I am concerned only with scientific associations, without thereby denying the relevance and importance of other conceptual considerations, such as historical, social, and cultural, depending upon the context. Regardless of whether it is the only appropriate mode of appreciation, scientifically informed nature aesthetics has to form a critical ingredient of green aesthetics, because it provides the possibility of a normative function for aesthetics. While "reluctant to rank" various ways of responding to nature," Marcia Eaton states that "if we want to develop a basis for rational evaluation of a landscape's ecological sustainability... we must stress the cognitive." Insofar as cultivating green aesthetics is a normative endeavor to promote sustainable futures, cognitive considerations regarding the ecological value of a natural object must underlie our aesthetic response to it.

For example, take a salt marsh, a typical example of "unscenic" landscape due to its rather nondescript appearance devoid of stunning features. Despite its seemingly simple look, it is a complex system which negotiates between differing saline content of the water. With this knowledge, we can begin to see and make sense of how the plant communities are distinctly demarcated to indicate their adaptation to the particular water content. Furthermore, knowing the intricate mechanism of a salt marsh which acts as an efficient water purifier (as well as many other functions it performs) may amuse us because of the contrast to the seemingly low-key, non-dramatic, monotonous appearance. The appreciation here is different from simply knowing and appreciating this kidney-like function of a salt marsh, because it would not require our direct sensual experience of the site; our conceptual understanding of its complex mechanism would be sufficient. The benefit of nature walks, such as through a salt marsh guided by a naturalist, is that we can transfer the conceptual understanding directly to the perceivable characteristics of the object or landscape, thereby appreciating the specific manner in which various facets are embodied, expressed, or even concealed or contradicted, by the sensual appearances.

Or, consider the cases where natural objects go through dramatic changes as part of their growth pattern or in response to surroundings or season. Examples include various forms of self-defense mechanism of natural creatures, the most notable of which is camouflage; transformation of a caterpillar or a tadpole into a butterfly or a frog; and the green leaves anticipating the change into brilliant red. We imaginatively juxtapose the anticipated change onto the present state of the object in front of us, thus rendering what otherwise may be a nondescript appearance amusing. Such additional information either helps us notice minute or subtle details that anticipate the forthcoming change or creates a sense of amusement because of the absence of such telltale signs. An unpuffed puffer fish may not appear interesting until we realize the dramatic change of size, shape, and texture that can take place when it is confronted by a predator. Or, Ken Weber points out in his nature writing that his attraction to a monarch butterfly is not simply by its inherent beauty but the fact that its earlier state is "a gaudy—perhaps ugly—striped caterpillar" and "the fact... that creepy caterpillars can be transformed into beautiful winged creatures," in addition to "their migration flights of a couple of thousand miles."

In these examples of scientifically informed nature aesthetics, imagination plays a key role. Emily Brady stresses the importance of perception and imagination in the aesthetic appreciation of nature, in part as a corrective to the overly cognitive approach advocated by science-based nature Distance as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," (The British Journal of Psychology 5 (1912-13)) in which he describes the appreciation made possible by psychical distancing to be directed toward the contrast between the anxiety-provoking danger and the seemingly calm, peaceful sensual surface of the fog.

80 In the past, I advocated science-based nature aesthetics as the most appropriate, along with Carlson and others (for example, in "The Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature" and "Appreciating Nature on Its Own Terms," Environmental Ethics 20:2 (Summer 1998): 133-40). However, I am beginning to think that judging what is appropriate/inappropriate must reference a particular context. For example, some natural objects and environments (such as the Plymouth Rock and the Gemmiburg lundsfeld) may have such important historical significance that it may be strange to insist that we appreciate them exclusively with scientific associations. I owe this point to Ned Hettinger.

81 Eaton, p. 134.

82 According to one recent account, wealden has about two dozen different functions (cited by Sun Van der Ryn and Smart Cowan, Ecological Design (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996), p. 117). Vileisis describes the beginning of the scientists' recognition concerning the wealden's ecological values during the 1960s as follows: "Scientists soon realized that the wealden was ecologically complex." (Vileisis, p. 317). This appreciation of the contrast between appearance and reality can be compared to the by-now classic fog example related by Edward Bullough in "Psychical
even including those aspects which are normally not appreciated, such as an elk carcass infested with maggots and scenically challenged “underdogs” like draba, various “weeds,” birch trees, bog, brush, marshes, prairies, plains, and juniper foothills, enumerated by Leopold. Leopold claims that we must develop “a refined taste in natural objects” which enables us to appreciate “a plain exterior (which) often conceals hidden riches.”

In cultivating this scientifically informed green nature aesthetics, however, we must take care to avoid what I call environmental determinism, whereby ecological value of an object automatically determines its aesthetic value. Following environmental determinism will get us away from our direct experience of the object’s sensuous surface and lead us to conclude, without reference to the object’s sensory attributes, that it is aesthetically positive because of its positive ecological role. Even with necessary incorporation of various conceptual considerations, the ultimate reference and basis of our aesthetic judgment has to be what is directly perceivable. In this regard, we have to take note of Leopold’s insistence on cultivating informed “perception” in his promotion of a land aesthetic. Acquired knowledge from ecology and natural history must be translated into the way in which nature looks, sounds, smells, and feels. Though referring specifically to cultural landscape, Arnold Berleant is correct in reminding us that gathering various information pertaining to a landscape is necessary, but not sufficient, in understanding it until we “relate this information to perceptual experience.”

Brady points out, and I agree, that aesthetically appreciating nature, particularly its unscenic aspects, such as “mudflats and wastelands” requires “the effort of the percipient,” as what one picks out for appreciation “depends to some extent on the effort I make with respect to engaging my perceptual capacities.” Art appreciation, too, demands the same kind of effort on our part, but help is available from established discourses: art history, art criticism, music appreciation, literary criticism, theater review,
and the like. In these disciplines, the connection between art historical and technical knowledge and the sensuous surface of the art object is assumed and becomes their central focus. In comparison, the study of nature is concerned primarily with scientific education, with little emphasis on promoting aesthetic appreciation. I believe ecologically oriented scientific study can gain a great deal from the way in which our understanding and appreciation of nature is facilitated by these various forms of educational aids and their methodologies. I find it most unfortunate that our educational system does not provide an equivalent of art, music, and literature courses in studying nature.

iv. Green aesthetics—artifacts

Green aesthetics guided by environmental values should be applicable not only to nature but also to artifacts. If green nature aesthetics is not as fully developed and established as aesthetics regarding art, green aesthetics regarding artifacts is even less developed due to specific challenges. First, in the cases of art and nature, we can normally expect a certain degree of knowledge regarding an object. Many of us go to the museum or concert primarily to gain an aesthetic experience and, if we are not already knowledgeable about the art object, we seek and find many means of enriching that experience, such as through exhibition catalogues, curator’s notes on the wall, and program notes, not to mention formal studies in art history and music appreciation. As for nature, though many of us may be relatively ecologically illiterate, there are plenty of opportunities for learning biology, natural history, geology, and ecology, not only academically but, perhaps more importantly, through nature museums, nature walks and bird watching guided by naturalists, films, and nature writings by literary figures.

However, these different means of promoting aesthetic appreciation are lacking when it comes to consumer goods and the built environment. Particularly with respect to consumer goods, are there any guides equivalent to those that are available for art and nature? Consumer guides address functionality, durability, and price of various goods and products, and green consumer guides provide information about their environmental dimensions, but such information is offered without any relationship to their aesthetic dimensions. While the aesthetic considerations are often important in making decisions and engaging in actions, there is no guide linking the aesthetic and the cognitive, which would be equivalent to

things like nature writings and art history. Furthermore, being preoccupied with the practical task at hand, such as making a purchasing decision or cleaning things, we rarely seek various avenues for enriching our aesthetic experience when dealing with those everyday objects.

Secondly, particularly in comparison with green nature aesthetics, there is a further complication when dealing with artifacts. While green aesthetics regarding nature can help render seemingly unattractive objects aesthetically appreciable, due to their environmental values, green aesthetics regarding artifacts has an additional mission: to render initially attractive objects not so aesthetically positive if they are environmentally harmful. That is, green aesthetic must make it the case that, in Marcia Eaton’s words, “what is ecologically bad begins to be seen as aesthetically bad.” However, such perception also has to be cultivated without invoking what I called environmental determinism. That is, the information about environmental harm should modify the initially attractive appearance of an object without completely nullifying the first impression or rendering it hideous-looking. Consider the example of a green lawn. It is typically maintained by a life-support system consisting of the concoction of a toxic brew of herbicide, insecticide, pesticide, and fertilizer, accompanied by the use of tremendous amount of water that most of us and communities can ill afford, as well as the inordinate amount of fuel needed for periodical motorized buzz-cut, leaf-blowing, and weed-whacking, all indicating the need for extensive and intensive detox program. Once knowing what is involved in caring for a lawn, it will be irresponsible of us not to incorporate this knowledge into our experience of it. However, green aesthetic sensibility should not require that the green carpet then appear downright ugly, as that is succumbing to environmental determinism. Instead, green aesthetic sensibility should guide us to modify our initial attraction with a sense of “disillusionment” created by the discrepancy between the seemingly beautiful appearance and its harmful content. As a result, the lawn starts looking somewhat garish, sinister, or morbidly beautiful; at the very least, it definitely will not stay innocently and benignly attractive.

These challenges specific to green consumer aesthetics indicate an extra responsibility on consumers. That is, they have to educate themselves about
the ecological ramifications of products and activities and find a way to relate the knowledge gathered to the sensuous appearance of the object. Unlike in the case of nature, no such discourse has yet been established. However, also unlike green nature aesthetics, the burden is not placed solely on consumers. Designers’ role here is crucial, perhaps more important than the consumers’. Indeed, as Victor Papanek reminds his own colleagues in the design profession, “design has become the most powerful tool with which man shapes his tools and environments (and, by extension, society and himself). This demands high social and moral responsibility from the designer.” Designers hold both the power and responsibility literally to shape our world; hence, developing green aesthetics of artifacts and built environment poses a challenge, as well as an opportunity, to them.

What then should be their strategy? One possible strategy is to maintain our popular aesthetic taste as is and work on rendering eco-friendly design so that it conforms to prevalent taste. Some advances have been made in these areas. For example, green architecture has come a long way from a solar panel awkwardly plopped up on the roof. Many contemporary green buildings display rather stunning effects, satisfying traditional aesthetic criteria, such as harmony, integrity, and balance.

However, just as there was a problem with an attempt to align the aesthetic of the unscenic nature with the conventional standard of the scenic, there are some problems with this attempt. One is a technical limitation. While some objects, such as architectural structures, may be improved to meet the popular expectations, this may not be possible with other products. For example, in her attempt to cultivate cottons which are colored in their raw material form (facilitated by selective breeding, thus eliminating the need for dyeing), Sally Fox has succeeded in producing various hues, except black. Similarly, fabrics developed by DesignTex which are dyed with 38 non-toxic substances (a result of eliminating 7,662 other toxic chemicals commonly used) do not boast vivid and vibrant colors. The same limitation seems to exist with soy and water-based ink colors. While some objects, such as architectural structures, may be improved to meet the popular expectations, this may not be possible with other products. For example, in her attempt to cultivate cottons which are colored in their raw material form (facilitated by selective breeding, thus eliminating the need for dyeing), Sally Fox has succeeded in producing various hues, except black. Similarly, fabrics developed by DesignTex which are dyed with 38 non-toxic substances (a result of eliminating 7,662 other toxic chemicals commonly used) do not boast vivid and vibrant colors. The same limitation seems to exist with soy and water-based ink colors.

At the same time, it is unwise to reject the prevailing aesthetic standard altogether by creating what one critic calls “the cult of ‘the natural,’” a kind of “an anti-aesthetic,” celebrating “plain brown biodegradable dresses and unbleached ‘Eco-Tees’ made of stiff, cardboard panels of recycled cotton tinted with environmentally sensitive dyes; lip sticks made of beet juice and face powder of brown oat flour; non-toxic, formaldehyde-free woolen pajamas,” and the like.

This anti-aesthetic approach is problematic, because, if its efficacy is predicated upon its disenfranchised aesthetic status, those green products will remain specialty goods for select consumers who are already concerned with the green issues. But the goal of cultivating green aesthetics is to make it mainstream, because ecological problems need to be addressed by a whole society, indeed by the global society, not just by a certain group of people.

Joan Nassauer in her discussion of “culturally sustainable” design, points out that the end-result of green design should not be too alien and unfamiliar to us, no matter how ecologically correct, because most likely we either get confused or turned off by the appearance, rendering the object culturally unsustainable. Instead, she recommends that the design be recognizable to us with some familiar cues and clues. For example, a constructed landscape consisting of indigenous wild flowers, while ecologically superior to the ubiquitous green lawn adorned with exotic flowers, if it is without any recognizable design vocabulary, may appear simply “messy,” “disorderly,” luster and smoothness of fabric and paper, can be attained in an ecologically responsible manner.

Theoretically, these technical limitations might be overcome in the future. However, just as in the case of nature aesthetics, the green aesthetic sensibility must incorporate something new and different so that we become educated about the environmental consequences of our commonly held aesthetic preferences. Here I agree with one designer’s comment that “the aesthetics of environmentally sensitive product designs should... be markedly different from designs in which these considerations have been omitted or ignored.”

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Joan Nassauer in her discussion of “culturally sustainable” design, points out that the end-result of green design should not be too alien and unfamiliar to us, no matter how ecologically correct, because most likely we either get confused or turned off by the appearance, rendering the object culturally unsustainable. Instead, she recommends that the design be recognizable to us with some familiar cues and clues. For example, a constructed landscape consisting of indigenous wild flowers, while ecologically superior to the ubiquitous green lawn adorned with exotic flowers, if it is without any recognizable design vocabulary, may appear simply “messy,” “disorderly,”
and “ill-kept.” She suggests making use of familiar signs, such as a neat border or orderly trim, to cue us in to the fact that the enclosed landscape is an important part of the environment, needing care and protection.

So here is a challenge, but also an opportunity, for the designers: to design products that embody their environmental values which are made aesthetically attractive through some familiar means, without simply making them conform to the popular taste which is for the most part not environmentally informed. How can the environmental value be expressed, embodied, or revealed through the object’s sensuous surface in an aesthetically positive manner so that we will be attracted not only by its environmental value but also by its aesthetic manifestation? I believe there are several promising candidates for a green consumer aesthetics. Here I shall simply list them with brief remarks, though in subsequent chapters I shall explore some of them more in depth by placing them in a larger aesthetic context.

a. Minimalism Perhaps the most easily recognizable and appreciable quality is minimalism regarding the sheer size (such as of packaging), the number of parts, and the number of materials used. Indeed, the most important of the 3R’s in ecological education (“reduce,” “reuse,” and “recycle”) is “reduce.” Many critics are ambivalent about promoting “reuse” and “recycle” because it creates a mentality that we can over-produce and over-consume, usurping various resources, as long as the end product gets reused or recycled.100 Source reduction is the most fundamental responsibility both for designers and consumers. Contribution to source reduction can underlie our appreciation for minimum packaging instead of bulky and unnecessary packaging, brown cardboard color and single-colored logo on store bags and boxes, and toys made with untreated, unpainted wood. The minimum size, economy of parts, and simplicity of design become all the more appreciable when perceived as evidence of ecological value.

b. Durability and longevity Another possibility is the presence of features indicative of durability and longevity of the object, not only literally but also as an antidote to planned obsolescence-driven style and fashion. They include the use of appropriate materials, easy disassembly, repairability, upgradability, simplicity of construction, as well as absence of excessive tendencies, superfluous additions, or extravagant features. We can come to appreciate not only the fact that the object is made for longevity and durability but also the way in which its design reveals these ecologically important values. In particular, because of the consumers’ relative ignorance regarding how and with what the object is made, “visual simplicity and visual comprehension” become crucial, as they “facilitate the ease of disassembly, maintenance and repair.”102

One interesting point about longevity of an object is that its surface must age well. If the aged surface appears shabby, tired, decrepit, or tattered, even if its functionality remains intact, often our impulse as consumers in this throwaway society is to replace it.103 Specifically, one designer advises against “delicate, high-gloss surfaces” and “monochrome surfaces and surface coatings” because they are “susceptible to being damaged and, perhaps more importantly, make any damage visually obvious.”104 Instead, he promotes “variation in texture, variation in color, irregularities in contours, diversity in finishes from glossy to matte, and intentional imperfections.” Examples include unpainted wood, and metal, leather, and clay, which “contrast abruptly with the coated and fragile surfaces commonly found in many contemporary products; which chip, scratch and degrade so rapidly,” seen in “automobile body panels and interior facias,” to experience, is akin to our aesthetic appreciation of the simplicity and elegance of a mathematical or scientific formula.

100 For example, Paul Hawken criticizes our society’s emphasis on recycling for being as “woefully inadequate” as “hollering out the Titanic with teaspoons,” as well as being “collective attempts to assuage guilt” (The Ecology of Commerce: The Declaration of Sustainability (New York: HarperBusiness, 1994), pp. 5 and 203). William H. Baarsch points out that recycling itself is an industry which requires a large amount of resources for energy and transportation (Chapter 11 of Eco-Facts & Eco-Fiction: Understanding the Environmental Debate (London: Routledge, 1996)).

101 The ultimate minimalism with respect to packaging is its elimination altogether, as in the form of bulk sale or refillable system. I think our appreciation in such a case, which has no perceivable object...
as well as "home appliances incased in painted metals or glossy plastics."105 Furthermore, taking nature's surface as a model, he urges that "the richness of chance effects... also be explored."106

c. "Fittingness," "appropriateness," or "site-specificity" While the first two features, minimalism and longevity, may be expected in all green design objects, there is also a requirement of diversity.107 This is the notion of "fittingness," "appropriateness," or "site-specificity," whether it consists of locally available materials or indigenous plants, consideration of a particular site, climate, culture, or a reference to vernacular vocabulary. Qualities such as fittingness and appropriateness seem to be particularly important when it concerns the built environment in and with which we live. Contrary qualities such as incongruity, contrast, or discordance can be aesthetically positive within a work of art, but seem almost always negative for the environment.108

For example, landscaping using indigenous plants, such as prairie grasses in the Midwest, initially deemed as appearing unkempt and disorderly, in comparison with the ubiquitous, smooth, green lawn sometimes adorned with exotic flowers, is now gaining more acceptance. On the other hand, a luscious green lawn in the middle of arid Arizona would strike us as being "out-of-place" because of its incongruity with the surrounding landscape.109

106 Walker, p. 23. Nigel Whiteley makes the same point regarding paper: "some designers believe that not only does the recycled product offer a superior aesthetic quality but, because there is no bleach in the paper, both paper and illustration age better." Whiteley, p. 81, emphasis added.

107 Some of the qualities characteristic of longevity of an object, discussed here, involve a seeming paradox. Papanek, for example, points out the apparent contradiction in "designing things to come apart efficiently," while Walker argues for the simplicity of the overall design accompanied by the complexity of the surface (Papanek, Green Imperative, p. 58, and Walker, p. 24).

108 Whiteley, while promoting diversity and pluralism for green design, points out that "when it comes to packaging and product design, however, there are some important aspects to consider. Even when recycled materials are used in the packaging of Green products, the guiding principle must be 'less is more,' implying that this principle must be universally adopted (p. 90).

109 Marcia Eaton discusses the category-specific nature of "natural" as it applies to environment, and I believe that her view is close to what I am here referring to as the "fittingness" (Eaton, p. 194).

110 It is noteworthy that one of the cardinal principles of ecological design is: "Solutions Grow from Place," epitomized in the questions posed by Wes Jackson, the director of the Land Institute, Salina, Kansas: "What was here? What will nature permit us to do here? And what will nature help us to do here?" This site-specificity can be applied not only to landscaping, agriculture, and architecture, but also to all cultural production, using locally available materials and resources. The "Solution" quote, which is presented as the first principle of ecological design, is the title of one chapter from Van der Ryn and Cowan, pp. 57-81. Wes Jackson's questions are taken from his "Nature as the Measure for a Sustainable Agriculture," included in Environmental Ethics: Concepts, Policy, Theory,ed. Joseph Desjardins (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999), p. 159. Papanek refers to Frank Lloyd Wright as someone who was concerned with designing which is sensitive to the place, by quoting the following passage by Wright praising indigenous, humble buildings: "Although often slight, their virtue is intimately related to the environment, to the heart of life of the people. Functions are usually modestly conceived and rendered invariably with natural feeling. Results are often beautiful and always instructive" (Papanek, Green Imperative, p. 249).


111 I don't want to overstate the point, particularly when it comes to the "fittingness" or "at-homeness" of a building in an impoverished surrounding, because aestheticization of poverty is problematic.
This emphasis on site-specificity results in respect for diversity, as well as the rejection of uniformity and monoculture. Not only does this attitude make ecological and cultural sense but also aesthetic sense, as pointed out by McDonough and Braungart: “human design solutions that do not respect [diversity] degrade the ecological and cultural fabric of our lives, and greatly diminish enjoyment and delight.”

Hence, New Urbanism, proposed as an alternative to suburban sprawl to serve a social and environmental ideal better, one critic warns, should not be imposed as the “one-size-fits-all” solution.

d. Contrast between past and present The examples from the Rural Studio projects suggest another avenue for green design to embody an aesthetic value, when the object is made with recycled, reused, or reclaimed materials or space: the contrast between the past and present uses. For example, the “as-is” use of automobile windshield for a roof or license plates and tires for the walls not only signals to the viewer the origin of the material but also creates interesting visual effects by the uneven, yet nicely patterned, surface. Furthermore, the comparison between the past and present uses of the material deepens our aesthetic appreciation by providing a kind of amusement and entertainment.

The same appreciation of the associated past history is a major factor in experiencing the restoration of an abandoned building or the rehabilitation of a brownfield.

We are familiar with this way of gaining aesthetic richness from associated past history in experiencing some fine arts. The use of ready mades and the genre of “appropriation” immediately come to our mind. But a much

from the moral point of view. I will explore this point in Chapter IV (a.iii and iv). The same comment can be extended to many artifacts created by people from impoverished communities or developing nations who have no choice but to make use of scrap materials or to reuse parts for different purposes. However, as I shall argue in Chapter V, the Rural Studio projects avoid the common mistake of considering only the utilitarian function, not to mention the economic limitation, of built structures for the poor or the displaced. Typically those structures do not address the aesthetic needs of the residents; they are ugly, cheap-looking, and exude the appearance of being hastily and carelessly put together. Instead, the end products of the Rural Studio embody the care taken in designing and constructing, as well as respect and honor paid to the residents’ humanity and dignity.

The technical term for this act of appropriation is mistake.

112 McDonough and Braungart, Cradle, p. 143.

113 Postrel, p. 131. The specific tenets of New Urbanism include a compact community with walkable streets as its public and social spaces, mixed neighborhoods with nodes of shops and services, a variety of residential forms, and preservation of nature such as parks and community gardens.

114 Another benefit of these reused materials in these structures is that they give “a feeling that they’ve been rained on; they look durable” (Dean, p. 9).

115 Postrel, p. 131. The specific tenets of New Urbanism include a compact community with walkable streets as its public and social spaces, mixed neighborhoods with nodes of shops and services, a variety of residential forms, and preservation of nature such as parks and community gardens.

116 Van der Ryn and Cowan, p. 164.

117 I thank Kevin Anderson and Jody Slay for an in-depth presentation and tour of the facility during the Harrington workshop at the University of Texas-Austin, Nov. 2003.

118 Van der Ryn and Cowan, pp. 164–5, emphasis added for the subsequent passage.
of this suggests a new kind of aesthetic for the built environment, one that explicitly teaches people about the potentially symbiotic relationship between culture, nature, and design.

**f. Health** Another possibility of green aesthetic value is the embodiment of health. Sometimes its appreciation is more dependent upon conceptual understanding, as in the case of landscape. The state of health of a constructed landscape, which in turn affects the well-being of humans and non-human creatures, may not always be apparent to the senses. It may require conceptual knowledge, “such as the number of hidden beetles or the presence or absence of microorganisms affecting a species of orchid,” as Eaton points out in her writing on “The Beauty That Requires Health.”

But such knowledge, once gained, cannot but affect one’s perceptual experience, so that “as one learns more about the invisible things that make particular ecosystems healthy, landscapes begin to look more or less healthy.” As discussed earlier, although I don’t advocate environmental determinism, such information regarding ecological concerns modifies the sensuous appearance of the landscape without nullifying its initial impression.

Some other times, however, the healthfulness of an environment can be directly experienced. This is particularly the case with architecture. In contrast to “sick” buildings with tightly sealed windows, perpetual artificial lighting, carpets and other interior materials emitting toxic fumes, green buildings promote health, both physical and psychological, through ventilation, lighting, and temperature control systems that make use of sunlight, outdoor air, and sometimes rainwater and indoor plants. The occupants and users of the building will literally “feel” the difference in lighting, air quality, temperature, humidity, and air movement. They may even sometimes hear and touch the water used for cooling and moisture, as well as enjoying plants used for both air and water purification. Indeed, some other times, however, the healthfulness of an environment can be directly experienced. This is particularly the case with architecture. In contrast to “sick” buildings with tightly sealed windows, perpetual artificial lighting, carpets and other interior materials emitting toxic fumes, green buildings promote health, both physical and psychological, through ventilation, lighting, and temperature control systems that make use of sunlight, outdoor air, and sometimes rainwater and indoor plants. The occupants and users of the building will literally “feel” the difference in lighting, air quality, temperature, humidity, and air movement. They may even sometimes hear and touch the water used for cooling and moisture, as well as enjoying plants used for both air and water purification.

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**g. Caring and sensitive attitude** Finally, perhaps the most general and all-embracing aesthetic value expressed by green objects may be the embodiment of the virtue of caring and sensitivity. A caring, sensitive, responsible attitude is admittedly a moral virtue, normally not associated with an aesthetic value. However, what is often overlooked is the fact that moral attributes are frequently experienced through aesthetic manifestations. When we get a clue from its sensuous surface that the object is designed with sensitivity to the well-being of both the environment and people, we appreciate not only the moral virtue but also the way in which it is conveyed through the specific features of its sensuous surface that I have discussed so far. It is similar to the pleasure we derive from handling a carefully, meticulously, and sensitively crafted object, which we interpret as expressing the respect for the materials and users, in contrast to other objects which appear to be put together in haste, carelessly, and wantonly, with no thought to their impact on the users, giving us an impression of indifference, insensitivity, or downright disrespect.

Green design can also be considered as a counterpart to the all-too-common grandstanding among designers and architects toward individual “statement”-making, irrespective of the effects on the people and the environment. Instead, when successful, green design can be appreciated for embodying a humble, respectful stand toward the environment, material, non-human creatures, and the health of the community.
and the users/occupants. Later in this book, I will give a more sustained discussion of the aesthetic manifestation of the respectful attitude toward materials and environments (Chapter III) and the general point that moral virtues can be expressed aesthetically, as well as some specific examples, including green design, to illustrate this point (Chapter V).

v. Limits of green aesthetics?
I do believe that the above characteristics help make green structures and products aesthetically appreciable, and ultimately make them more acceptable and commercially successful than if they are promoted exclusively by their environmental values. However, is there a limit to the role of aesthetics in promoting sustainable future by aesthetic engineering, just as I believe there is a limit to “positive aesthetics” regarding nature? I think one limiting factor is our physiological threshold of tolerance particularly regarding unpleasant odor. As I will argue in Chapter III, our reaction to unpleasant smell can to a certain degree be mitigated by experiencing it as a part of “the sense of place.” The smell of manure, to borrow a Japanese expression, is “a perfume of farmland,” while the odor of a rotten egg can be appreciable in a volcanic sulfur vent. However, no matter how enlightened we become about the ecological benefit of composting, for example, it seems almost impossible to overcome our visceral reaction to its bad smell. The same is true of certain sounds, as indicated by people’s objection to the whirling sound of wind turbines at their early stage of development, a problem which subsequently seems to have been overcome with better technology. Part of the difficulties with these modes of sensing is that we cannot escape from these sensations, unless we literally escape, unlike the sensation of vision which, if necessary, we escape by closing our eye or turning our head.

Furthermore, vision, among all the senses, traditionally considered closest to our intellectual faculty, seems most amenable to conceptual transformation (as in the brilliant sunset and luscious lawn beginning to look garish after revelation of the environmental harm involved). When we protest loudly against an eyesore scarring an environment, it is usually directed toward that aspect which is actually detrimental to the environment, such as littering, belching black smoke, clear-cutting, and the like. So it would appear that visual impressions can be relatively easily manipulated by a certain agenda, such as greener future. Just as environmental disvalue gives rise to the experience of aesthetic disillusionment, positive environmental value should help “beautify” objects initially experienced as unattractive.

However, the Capewind project illustrates that is it not that simple, though I will ultimately argue for the possibility of another form of aesthetic engineering. This is the case in which the support of its environmental value does not seem to overcome negative aesthetic reactions, evidenced by the fact that many opponents do embrace the project’s environmental import. Is there any way in which an aesthetic argument can still be given for environmentally sound structures, such as this wind farm?

A number of possibilities can be raised. For example, we can urge Capewind to eliminate clearly aesthetically negative factors which plagued past wind farm projects: juxtaposition of differently designed wind turbines, inconsistent directions of the blade movement, neglect of malfunctioning or broken blades, inconsistent or insufficient spacing between turbines, and turbines’ color unsuitable for the setting. Or, we can urge the opponents to compare the seascape with wind turbines with an imaginary seascape with environmentally harmful structures, such as nuclear power plants, oil rigs, or belching smoke stacks. Most likely the wind farm-seascape is not going to be considered as aesthetically negative as these imaginary seascapes. Or we can ask them to look at the wind farm as if it were an environmental installation piece, similar to Christo’s Valley Curtain, Running Fence, Surrounded Islands, Umbrella Project, or Walter de Maria’s Lightning Field. We can also remind them that landscapes are never static; neither is our reaction. New structures in a familiar landscape are often met with resistance initially, but subsequently accepted and ultimately aesthetically appreciated. Think about people’s initial reactions to the Eiffel Tower and the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial. Even the Golden Gate Bridge, when new, was decried as an “eye-sore to those living and a betrayal of future generations.”

These strategies may all be helpful, but not wholly effective. The first attempt may reduce or minimize aesthetically negative factors, but it

124 I discussed this issue in “Machines in the Ocean” and “Response to Jon Boone’s Critique” in Contemporary Aesthetics (<http://www.contempaesthetics.org> 2004 and 2005 respectively).
125 These aesthetic problems are compiled from chapter II of Righter.
126 Postrel, p. 156.
is doubtful whether that attempt renders the overall effect aesthetically positive. The second strategy essentially consists of choosing the "lesser of two evils," hence, again, not arguing positively for the aesthetic value of the wind farm. The third requires the suspension of disbelief and is ultimately not workable, because the wind farm simply is not a work of art—it is strictly a utilitarian structure. Finally, "the test of time" argument is at best iffy because, for every new structure which subsequently becomes praised, there is another example which makes us question in retrospect: "what were we/they thinking?" Examples include "highways constructed that interrupt neighborhoods or parks or views."127 As Postrel reminds us, "the test of time works both ways."128

Perhaps a more promising strategy is to encourage us to experience the specific wind farm in a larger context, both spatial and temporal, and to imagine the overall aesthetic consequences with and without such a facility. David Orr suggests that the definition of beauty required for green aesthetics would have to be elevated to "a higher order of beauty" that "causes no ugliness somewhere else or at some other time."129 Wind farms then will embody, both literally and symbolically, a cleaner environment, with no air or water pollution, no mining for earth's resources, or no creation of toxic waste. It will be experienced as "appropriate" or "congruent" with its surrounding, because not only does it not pollute the air or water nor harm creatures, but it is also gratefully accepting and deriving maximum benefit out of the site-specific gift nature is providing—wind and open space. And we can witness this nature's gift at work in the movement of the blades.

In promoting this new aesthetic sensibility of sustainability, Robert Thayer, a landscape architect, insists that we make the embodiment of sustainable design fully visible and accessible, contrary to our usual tendency to hide signs of technology. That is, this new aesthetic sensibility should be facilitated and nurtured by our experiencing and living with those mechanisms which are its major players, such as wind turbines, solar panels, constructed wetland, and natural storm drainage.130 Thayer calls these "conspicuous nonconsumption" and regards them "essential markers along the road to a more sustainable world."131 When there are enough cases of such aesthetic endorsement, landscapes with wind farms will become integrated into our aesthetic vocabulary through what Thayer calls "an accrual of positive environmental symbolism."132 and they will add to the cumulative and collective memories of our cultural landscape.

However, Thayer himself is well aware of the impediment to developing this new aesthetic sensibility: our almost knee-jerk reaction to "the machine in the garden." "The ideal image [of pastoralism] ... seems to resist change" because "people prefer 'natural' landscapes over those influenced by humans"; hence, "although arguably a philosophically bankrupt notion, it shows little sign of relinquishing its power over American landscape aesthetics."133 This challenge is particularly pertinent in the Cape Wind case, because the environmental values and the larger contexts are already recognized and appreciated by many opponents; they are fully educated and enlightened about its environmental benefit and the big picture. That is, cultivating ecologically informed aesthetic sensibility should be the most crucial ingredient of green aesthetics, but, as the case of the wind farm indicates, there seems to be a limit to that approach. So are there any other strategies left for green aesthetics in this case?

Let me offer one more possibility of furthering this mode of aesthetic engineering, I am taking a cue from Yi-Fu Tuan's notion of "topophilia," which states that our attitude toward and resultant appreciation of a place cannot be dissociated from the personal, as well as cultural and societal, relationship we have with it.134 Very often our direct involvement in altering a landscape seems to generate our affection and attachment toward the resultant landscape, which then leads to a positive aesthetic appreciation. Consider, for example, a well-known anecdote related by William James in one of the few examples outside nature aesthetics where conceptual considerations

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127 Postrel, p. 257.
128 Orr, pp. 183 and 134.
129 In addition to these, Thayer includes material recycling facilities, minimum tillage and organic farming practices, drip irrigation systems, bicycle transportation networks, and multipurpose wastewater treatment wetlands which double as wildlife reserves or recreation areas. Robert L. Thayer, Jr., *Green World, Green Heart: Technology, Nature, and the Sustainable Landscape* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994), p. 126.
130 Thayer, pp. 185 and 134.
render initially negative aesthetic response positive. He describes how "coves" in North Carolina, a recently cleared field left with charred tree stumps and irregularly planted corn, which to him was "unmitigated squalor" and "a mere ugly picture on the retina," turned out to be a landscape redolent with pride and dignity to the residents, because it symbolized "a very paean of duty, struggle, and success," based on their honest sweat and labor.\footnote{William James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," in Talks to Teachers (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912), pp. 231-4. I think James goes too far by committing the fallacy of environmental determinism, when he disconsolately mentions that the spectators' judgment is sure to... possess no worth. I believe that his first impression of "unmitigated squalor" remains important because the subsequent appearance of heart-felt pride is facilitated precisely because of its crude, unassuaged appearance: the effect would have been quite different if the clearing appeared slick and orderly, executed with expert skill and technique.} I believe that a similar observation can be made concerning the way in which urban dwellers take pride and find aesthetic appeal in what otherwise may appear as a crude-looking, amateurish community garden.

This personal connection and resultant affection with a built environment should be tapped into, particularly when planning and designing a structure that alters a landscape. When a new structure modifies or transforms a familiar landscape, I wonder how much of people's resistance toward what is regarded as "the machine in the garden" is based upon an underlying feeling of resentment that the project was concocted by outsiders and "imposed" upon them. If the residents do not feel they are a part of the process, they don't have ownership of the project; in short, they feel alienated. What if, hypothetically, they took part in designing the structure, placement, and arrangement of the turbines, if not as professional designers and engineers but as concerned citizens by voicing their ordered preferences among a number of possibilities? What I am exploring is whether their aesthetic judgment that the ocean view is spoiled, destroyed, ruined, marred by wind turbines would remain the same, if they had some say in the process, making them feel that the resultant project was at least partially their idea, their initiative, and their design.\footnote{If we subscribe to the traditional, art-oriented aesthetic theory, our personal relationship to and stake in an object should be irrelevant to its aesthetic value. For example, the fact that my friend composed a particular piece of music is irrelevant to its musical merit; similarly, the fact that a particular landscape photograph depicts my hometown in Japan has nothing to do with whether or not it is a good photographic work. We certainly do not want art critics and art historians to bring in their very personal associations and investments to bear upon their professional aesthetic judgments of a work of art. However, what is appropriate and expected in the field of art is not always readily applicable to our aesthetic life outside the realms of art.}

Thus, one effective way of ensuring a positive aesthetic experience of a particular environment is for us to be participants in some way, which generates our affection and attachment. I believe such a personal relationship and affectionate response is inseparable from its perceived aesthetic value. And this "topophilia" resulting from people's involvement and engagement should be fully attended to and utilized.\footnote{The importance of attending to people's attitude toward their landscape is explored by Laurence Short in "Wind Power and English Landscape Identity," included in Pasqualetti, et al. For example, he claims that "the wind industry must respect our cultural connection to the land, an attachment to the landscape that has been reaffirmed in the United Kingdom as a metaphor for national identity." (p. 57).} My thinking here stems from a newly emerging environmental ethic called civic environmentalism, which recognizes and emphasizes that solutions to various challenges facing environment need citizens' commitment to better their environment. That is, no matter how environmentally sound and well-meaning a certain goal, policy, or project may be, if it is perceived as something imposed on citizens from above or outside, such as a government or an outside environmental organization, its success and cultural sustainability is doubtful.\footnote{In advocating civic environmentalism, Andrew Light points out that, while legal, political, and even philosophical and religious persuasion is indispensable, "if all environmental legislation were mandated from above and local populations had no reason to take an interest in environmental protection, then little would motivate citizens to respect laws other than threats of punitive consequences which are often difficult to enforce." ("Urban Ecocultural Citizenship," Journal of Social Philosophy 34:1 (Spring 2003), p. 53).} Citizens need to be enfranchised and the sense of empowerment will positively affect their aesthetic experience of the object and project.\footnote{The importance of empowering citizens in a project like wind farm is stressed by a number of writers in Wind Power in Vine (Short, Brittan, Pasqualetti, Gipe).} But, as I mentioned earlier, wind farms in general do have disadvantages compared with other community projects. We can "engage" with them only visually, but not literally.\footnote{Gordon G. Brittan, Jr. points out that wind turbines "preclude engagement. The primary way in which the vast majority of people can engage with them is visually. They cannot climb over and around them. They cannot get inside them. They cannot touch them." ("The Wind in One's Sails: A Philosophy" in Pasqualetti, et al, p. 71.)} Offshore facilities have further disadvantages compared with inland facilities because there is very little possibility for each resident to interact actively with the structures. It is not impossible, however. For example, the residents can be a part of the process of choosing colors, spacing, and arrangement. They can also act as a distant and visual caretaker by reporting damaged or malfunctioning turbines. Or,
after the example of Austin, Texas, which made a tourist attraction out of a bat colony, this seascape with a wind farm, the first in the United States and the biggest in the world, can be promoted as a new tourist destination. Thus, in the context of aesthetic engineering for promoting a sustainable world, what may otherwise be dismissed as being irrelevant by art-centered aesthetics or disinterested aesthetic attitude theory, such as our personal relationship with and stake in the object or a commercial interest in promoting tourism, needs to be considered and sometimes taken advantage of.

I started this chapter by arguing that, contrary to our initial impression that they are trivial, insignificant, and innocuous, the aesthetic judgments we make on everyday matters do have serious implications and exert a surprising degree of power over the state of the world and our life. In order to illustrate this phenomenon, what I call the power of the aesthetic, I first presented the ways in which our popularly held aesthetic sensibility seems to work against environmental values. As much as this is a problematic aspect of our everyday aesthetics, the other side of the coin is that this power can be utilized to achieve a more desirable end, in this case sustainable world and living. I remain hopeful that it is possible to formulate and instill in us an ecologically sensitive aesthetic taste regarding both nature and artifacts, although the designers of artifacts and built structures also bear responsibility in realizing green aesthetic values in their products. All of these considerations are meant to underscore the power of the aesthetic in our everyday life, as it can be wielded for a better world and life. Of course any social change needs to be driven by a concerted effort among various sectors: political, social, legal, educational, economic, and technological. I also believe that some aesthetic disagreements cannot be resolved by aesthetics alone. Particularly with respect to environmental aesthetics, the aesthetic judgments are subject to deeper visions and commitments regarding social and political issues, such as economic justice, capitalism, the notion of good life, and the

They are also amenable to change with new scientific discovery. However, what I want to point out is that aesthetics do have a surprisingly important, if not decisive, role to play and our current neglect needs to be challenged and corrected.

I thank Sheila Lintott for this reference. There are also precedents for marketing wind farms by using them as a backdrop for advertising or a film scene. See Brittan, p. 63, Martin J. Pasqualetti, "Living with Wind Power in a Hostile Landscape," in Pasqualetti, et al., 165, and Robert L. Thayer, Jr., Gray World, p. 131.

I found Marcia Eaton's discussion of "aesthetics and ethics in the environment" to be valuable and relevant to my discussion here. Her discussion is particularly helpful because it is illustrated with ample examples. See chapter 12 of her Mint.