

Editorial

Environmental aesthetics is not just another school or movement in aesthetical thinking and scholarship like idealist aesthetics, Marxist aesthetics, modernist aesthetics, Frankfurt School aesthetics and so on; nor does it refer to any national or cultural boundaries such as Indian aesthetics, Arabic aesthetics or Italian aesthetics. Environmental aesthetics, on the other hand, is an aesthetical treatment of environment as a whole that includes the given one called nature as also its various modifications, re-organisations and changes made by man. It is composed of both the "real estate", i.e., soil etc. as well as of "goods and chattels", i.e., buildings, plants and animals. Environment, in its broadest sense, now-a-days covers almost all the means of human activities and behaviour such as social, political, religious and cultural systems and performances exhibited in all the varieties of art forms and scientific inventions. So we use expressions like cultural/religious/scientific/intellectual environments. Similarly, one can use the expression aesthetical environment. But what exactly is environmental aesthetics?

Aesthetics is traditionally defined as metacriticism (M.C. Beardsley), a body of writings which formulate theoretical principles about general problems of different individual arts. If art is a man-made object, even by manipulating the materials of the given nature such as clay, stone, wood, colour and sound, then art in both its Greek and Latin derivatives (*techni* and *ars*) means an artifact or artificial object as opposed to the given nature or environment. Obviously, then, aesthetics of environment or environmental aesthetics sounds self-contradictory. Although art has been defined as an *imitation* of nature, it has always been treated as superior to nature during the post-Platonic era continuing for more than two millennia—from Aristotle to Marcel Duchamp. Nature is left to its own fate. But imitations of nature excepting the ones in the architectural structures which cannot be accommodated within a man-made building, are carefully preserved in the museums. Keats' "Greecian Urn" is a bride unravished by time not so much for its beauty as for its being carefully preserved. Many more beautiful things in nature are destroyed by the same nature everyday. Man's sense of beauty is selfishly confined only to his own creations. If he is a *homo aestheticus* (an aesthetic animal) he must take equal care of the beauties of nature. Instead, he has been deliberately destroying nature for his material purposes in the name of technological enrichment of human culture. But random destruction of nature has now caused severe damage to the environment as a whole, as a result of which the horrifying environmental pollution has threatened the human survival itself. Hence this awakening: Nature is the primordial art form. Its beauty must be appreciated and preserved. Environment is not something only external to human life. "Environment...is the natural process as people live it, however, they live it. Environment is nature experienced, nature lived" (Berleant) and environmental aesthetics is:

The aesthetics of the real world. In this the environment means all of the observer's external world: the natural environment, the cultural environment and the constructed environment. The opposite is the aesthetics of the imaginary world of the arts. The boundary between these two worlds of course is not fixed. Buildings, gardens, sculptures etc. are part of our environment as works of art. Works of art as *physical objects* belong to environmental aesthetics, but, of course, as *aesthetic objects* too they exist permanently as drawings and models, as score-like directions for realization and performance; as parts of the environment, they only last for a certain time.

— Yrjö Sepänmaa, *The Beauty of Environment*, (P.17)

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