1. Ideas for a Social Aesthetics


**ABSTRACT**

In this chapter I want to sketch out the case for a social aesthetics. Relating the theory of the arts to social thought is not common. Indeed, apart from Schiller's tantalizing insights it has rarely been attempted. True, there have been tangential associations of the aesthetic with the social, as in the growing interest in aesthetic education. And, of course, the intersection of art and morality, pondered increasingly, brings the two together, since morality always implicates human relations. Probing this connection more directly and explicitly may be illuminating in surprising ways. Even more, it might contribute to a philosophy of culture. Let us see how this is possible.

2. Aesthetics and Community


**ABSTRACT**

What I should like to offer here is a preliminary sketch of a larger project, but one that I hope makes a significant statement about community. Beginning with some observations about individual and community, surely the central factors in social philosophy, I shall propose a convenient schema within which to place many of the endlessly varied instances of human association. This is not an exercise in typology, for the rational, the moral, and the aesthetic communities, the forms I shall use, are not pure nor are they logically exclusive. They do, however, distinguish different kinds of social experience and understanding, and they are useful for grouping actually existing societies. Most important, they represent real alternatives in social choice. Since theoretical ideas and moral criteria underlie every conception of community, and since normative experience is the basis on which we must evaluate social forms, let me begin with some observations about ethics.

3. The Idea of a Cultural Aesthetic


**ABSTRACT**

In its search for universal knowledge, philosophy has usually been mired in its own presuppositions. Its illuminating principles have often turned out to be illusions, its eternal truths merely local knowledge, its moral imperatives the architecture of custom often disguising the interests of privilege behind the sanctimoniousness of ethical
structures. The ancient dialectic between the Stoics and the Sophists continues to replay itself seemingly without end. But surely we must come at some point to a re-structuring of the issues, a re-direction of the philosophic quest. Where might this lie?

4. The Cultural Aesthetics of Environment

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**ABSTRACT**

Common problems invite coordinated solutions. It would greatly assist cooperative action on environmental issues if we shared a similar understanding of the ideas that are central to this situation. Encouraging as the global interest in environment may be, it is nonetheless the case that research on the aesthetics of environment displays significant differences in the meaning of its central ideas. It may therefore help reduce the inconsistencies and confusion in what is meant by the key concepts by clarifying their meanings. In such a spirit, I should like to offer some reflections on how we might bring together the sometimes disjointed thinking on the underlying issues.

5. The Social Evaluation of Art


**ABSTRACT**

How can art and artist be both autonomous and inseparable from the network of social processes? Aren't these incompatible conditions? Not exactly, for while the arts are an integral part of the social order, their social value, I want to argue, rests on the preservation of artistic freedom. Under such a condition the arts not only make their unique contribution and demonstrate their distinctive value, but this curious circumstance provides a basis on which to evaluate the individual work of art. We arrive, then, at an unanticipated consequence: The more completely art is encouraged to pursue its own course, to follow its inherent direction, the more successfully will the arts be able to make their distinctive contribution to social life. The rest of this chapter is an elaboration and defense of that claim.

6. Subsidization of Art as Social Policy


**ABSTRACT**

The arts have always been integrated into their larger culture, responding to shifts in taste and fashion and to changes in the social uses to which they have been put, as much as they have promoted those same changes. Even their alienation reflects a social influence. When this relation between society and the arts is recognized and affirmed, it can enhance both by rediscovering the human locus of perceptual meaning and by encouraging fuller social consciousness. An enlightened and imaginative program of subsidies would promote cultural evolution. And an inclusive conception of art and its
social role can lead to their distinctive contribution to the physical and social shape of our environment.

7. Objects into Persons: The Way to Social Aesthetics DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/M6MC6S
Aesthetics Between Art and Society: Perspectives of Arnold Berleant’s Postkantian Aesthetics of Engagement, Espes Vol. 6, No 2 (2017), 9-18. ISSN: 1339-1119

ABSTRACT
This essay traces the steps to a social aesthetics. I begin by affirming the central place of sense experience for aesthetics and its refinement in the perceptual acuity of a developed sensibility. This leads to associating aesthetic appreciation with such perceptual experience. Rejecting the identification of disinterestedness with such appreciation, I propose the full participatory involvement in the experience of appreciation as expressed by the concept of aesthetic engagement. This describes the appreciative situation as an aesthetic field in which the perceptual, creative, focusing, and activating factors are in reciprocal interaction. It characterizes not only appreciation in the arts but occurs as well in appreciating natural, built, and social environments.

Aesthetic engagement in social aesthetics is exemplified by the gaze in the experience of four well-known paintings I shall consider. Following these I shall develop a series of related ideas that lead to the concept of a social aesthetics. Finally, I shall return to the paintings for an enhanced understanding of social aesthetics.

8. Designing Outer Space DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/M67H1DM4T

ABSTRACT
With the technical ability to control environmental conditions totally in wholly planned communities, determining their spatial characteristics, temperature, humidity, weather, atmospheric pressure, length of day, and gravity, we have the opportunity to fashion experience to a degree that was once inconceivable. There seem to be relatively few technical constraints on designers. Yet should technological and economic considerations alone determine the nature of our environment? Is what we are able to do the only limit on what we should do? Technology offers options without answers, but are there moral requirements that make certain choices preferable? And if aesthetic and ethical factors are unavoidably joined to technological ones, how can we combine their constraints and opportunities into a creative synthesis? The possibility of setting cultural, aesthetic, and ethical goals in advance raises basic questions about their choice. What should serve as a guide? Fundamental philosophical questions arise here in a setting that compels an answer.
9. The Subversion of Beauty

Chinese translation by Zhao Yu, South China Academics (University of Macau), 2018.

ABSTRACT
We can see how an aesthetic analysis of the mechanisms of mass culture can reveal many of the hidden ways in which sensibility is appropriated and controlled. It may not be too far-fetched to recall Aristotle’s definition of a slave as a living tool. How else should we think of a person whose sensibility has been so taken over that one’s very perception of the world is controlled by others. This is more than physical domination, more than thought control; it is control over the very substance of experience. Would it be too strong to call this total enslavement? Through such an analysis as this essay suggests, aesthetics is empowered to become an instrument of emancipation.

10. The Critical Aesthetics of Disney World


ABSTRACT
Disney World collects many themes into one enormous “fantasia,” a composite of disparate types from various sources--futuristic, ethnic, fantasy, adventure. It is a true anthology of distinctive environments. In its enormous variety, Disney World might be considered a microcosm of America’s cultural pluralism; on the contemporary scene it stands as the kitsch of postmodernism. Yet its meanings do not lie wholly on the surface. Disney World invites a range of interpretations that parallels its postmodern ethos, making it at the same time an endlessly fertile subject for the subtextual elaborations of deconstruction. Like some of its rides whose sights appear abruptly out of the darkness, the rich significance of Disney World’s environments appears on multiple levels and in strange juxtapositions. By exploring some of its multiple facets through an aesthetic analysis, I hope to uncover some unusual dimensions of Disney World’s character as a postmodern environment. And deconstructing some of its multiple meanings will not only disclose its powerful normative message but inform a moral judgment as well.

11. Negative Aesthetics and Everyday Life


ABSTRACT
The discipline of aesthetics is generally associated with art, and the word ‘aesthetics’ is often taken to connote art that is valued as good or great. What that value is and how to assess it are central questions for aesthetic theory. Despite common usage, however, the word ‘aesthetic’ is not synonymous with ‘beauty’ and has applications far wider than to art alone. The etymology of ‘esthetic’ emphasizes its central meaning of sense perception, and I use the word emphasizing that core meaning. However, sensory experience, and hence aesthetic experience, is not always positive, and when it is offensive, distressing, or has harmful or damaging consequences, the aesthetic leads us to the realm of the negative. In this essay I want to identify some of the conditions when aesthetic value is present but in unsatisfying, painful, perverse, or even destructive ways. I shall focus on the human environment and shows how the aesthetic fuses with
the moral. We can give a name to sensory experience that has no clear positive value, the underside of beauty, so to say, and call it negative aesthetics.

12. Perceptual Politics

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/q2td-pq12

ABSTRACT
Moved by the pervasiveness and insistence of political forces in social life, many scholars have been drawn increasingly to recognize the strands of the aesthetic that are woven into its texture. They have gone beyond dealing with the ways that the arts are used in political propaganda and for arousing patriotic feeling. The aesthetic has come to be recognized as a perceptual domain of considerable power and influence, and some analysts have assigned it a crucial place in political theory. Making the aesthetic central in political theory may be surprising, for two such dissimilar domains of thought and experience might seem, at first, difficult to reconcile. Yet the association of aesthetics with politics has been made, and it will be illuminating to look at some applications that assign the aesthetic dimension a critical place in social and political thought. Let me then trace some of the appeals to the aesthetic in founding political theory, first considering Friedrich Schiller before moving into contemporary proposals.

13. The Aesthetics of Politics

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/7t9e-hw54

ABSTRACT
Illuminating the pervasiveness and importance of the aesthetic presence was the task I undertook in my recent book, Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World, and this essay develops the final chapter in that book. What I want to do here is carry that process still further, most particularly into the regions of political theory. For the energies of the artistic process invariably engage the social world, and the implications of artistic practice and aesthetic experience are necessarily political. Let me try to show how this is so.

14. The Aesthetic Politics of Environment

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/M6SF2MB6B

ABSTRACT
The historical course of the aesthetic and the artistic does not support the idea that the artistic enterprise is or should be wholly self-directed. On the contrary, the social history of the arts demonstrates their responsiveness to forces in the human world. Whether as subject-matter, referent, incentive, or motive, the larger and all-inclusive social world is immanent in art in diverse and often unpredictable ways. And, conversely, aesthetic perception, which lies at the heart of art, is immanent and pervasive in the human world.
Exposing the many strands and layers of the influence of the aesthetic reveals as much about human sociality as it does about art.

Illuminating the pervasiveness and importance of the aesthetic presence was the task of my recent book, *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World*. This essay carries that process still further, particularly into the regions of political theory. It aims to show that the energies of the aesthetic process invariably encompass and engage the social world, and that the implications of artistic practice and aesthetic experience are necessarily political. Let us consider how thoroughly interwoven are the social, the political, and the aesthetic.

15. Art, Terrorism, and the Negative Sublime  
DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/M6VQ2S91X](http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/M6VQ2S91X)  

**ABSTRACT**

It has become increasingly clear that the arts, and the aesthetic, more generally, occupy no hallowed ground but live on the everyday earth of our lives. Recognition is growing that the aesthetic is a pervasive dimension of the objects and activities of daily life. The range of such occasions is limitless, and this adds to the significance of the aesthetics of the everyday. Such an expansion of the aesthetic has important consequences. Perhaps the most striking is need to acknowledge that the range of aesthetic experience includes more than the appreciative engagement with art and nature. But not only does the aesthetic extend to the uncustomary; it encompasses the full range of human normative experience. Experiences of the aesthetic include not only the elevated and noble but the reprehensible, degrading, and destructive. This is so not as the result of an arbitrary decision to include them but from actual experience and practice. The aesthetic offers a full and direct grasp of the human world. That it may include violence and depravity is not the fault of aesthetics but of that world.

16. Reflections on the Aesthetics of Violence  
DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/aph9-1969](http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/aph9-1969)  

**ABSTRACT**

Violence has long been a factor in human life and has been widely depicted in the arts. This essay explores how the artistic and appreciative responses to violence have been practiced, understood, and valued. It emphasizes the difference between the aesthetics of distant, disinterested appreciation and the engaged appreciative experience of violence in the arts, and insists on the relevance of their behavioral and ethical implications.