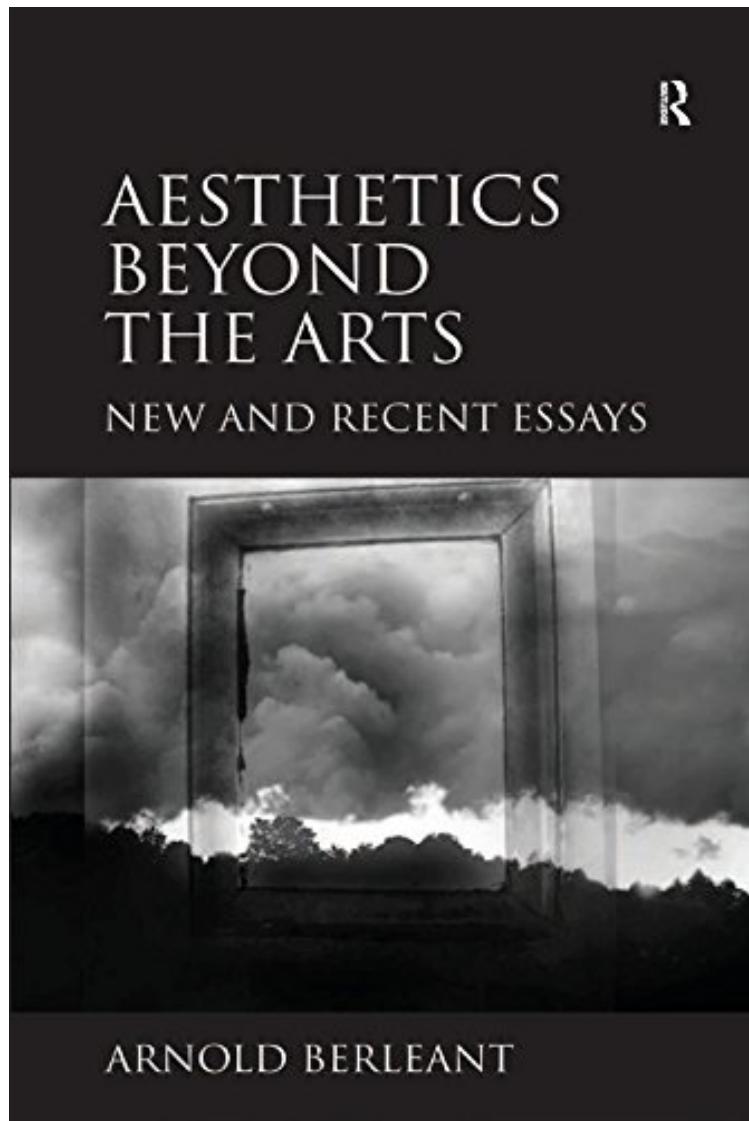


Aesthetics beyond the Arts: New and Recent Essays

Arnold Berleant
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Arnold Berleant : Aesthetics beyond the Arts: New and Recent Essays before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Aesthetics beyond the Arts: New and Recent Essays:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Pushing Aesthetics into New RegionsBy Thomas LeddyWarning to readers of this page: the "Review" on the top of the page on this book is mistakenly there and does not refer to Berleant's book. Arnold Berleant is one of the leading figures in contemporary aesthetics. Although he has done considerable work in the aesthetics of art his primary area of interest has been in the aesthetics of the environment. Many authors who work in this area limit their interest to the natural environment. However, Berleant is equally interested in other environments, including urban ones. provides on this page a sample of the book which includes his

Preface and most of the first chapter, "Judging Architecture." It does not provide a table of contents. Most of the chapters in the book were previously published in other places. However, some are published here for the first time. The second and third chapters are on the aesthetics of music, one on the role of titles in music and the other on how to teach music. The meat of the book, however, begins with Part II and the opening chapters of that part, "Art, Nature, Environment" and "The Re-Shaping of Experience." These chapters provide a good overview of Berleant's overall position. As Berleant observes in his preface, the key idea he is promoting in this book is that aesthetics is not limited to the arts. More generally, Berleant wants to rebuild the foundation of aesthetic theory. I will give an outline of this new foundation at the end of this review. The three chapters that follow are devoted to the concepts of landscape and scenic beauty, followed by a chapter on forestry aesthetics, one on the aesthetics of urban environments and another on ecological aesthetics. This section concludes with an effort in cross-cultural aesthetics: a chapter on the aesthetics of Chinese gardens. Part III, called "Implications" begins with a critique of Kant's aesthetics and particularly the concept of disinterestedness. It is followed by a chapter praising John Dewey's aesthetics, although Berleant questions Dewey's commitment to the formal aspect of what he called "an experience" since artists, for example, sometimes rightly reject formal unity as an ideal. Chapter 15 is on evolutionary naturalism and the abandonment of dualism, Chapter 16 on the politics of environment, Chapter 17 on the changing meaning of landscape, and Chapter 18 on beauty and modern life. Berleant's ideas may best be thought of in terms of eight crucial concepts. 1. Aesthetic Field. From his earliest book Berleant has argued for the idea that aesthetic experience is holistic and complex involving many factors that are interdependent including "perceptual, focused, creative, and performative aspects." All four of these factors contribute to the integrity of the aesthetic field. 2. Environmental Aesthetics and Everyday Aesthetics. Aesthetic theory may be applied to various environmental domains including wilderness, rural, agricultural, desert, marine, urban, and architectural environments. Also aesthetic awareness and appreciation may be extended beyond the arts to everyday life, to such things as food and popular culture, but also to the domain of negative aesthetic experience, including even terrorism. 3. Critique of Disinterestedness. Berleant believes that aesthetics and philosophy of art took a wrong turn in the 18th century with development of the concept of disinterestedness (valuing something for its own inherent qualities independently of any other considerations) especially in the work of Kant. He sees this idea as not founded in aesthetic experience but in a need for objective judgment. However, the theory fails whenever we turn to things that have a function. Appreciation of the environment often cannot be separated from matters of practical interest, for instance in the question of where to place a road. Moreover, the concept of disinterestedness is based on an outmoded dualist conception of the self. 4. Engagement. Instead of disinterestedness, Berleant advocates the concept of engagement as central to aesthetics. For instance in appreciation of natural environments we should not seek to contemplate nature as though it were a landscape painting. Rather, we should walk, swim or row through it with all of our senses engaged. Only one of the conditions of appreciation is the "classic" mode in which the viewer stands back to regard the work of art. Engagement covers a much wider range of aesthetic experience than the classic mode. This idea is inspired in part by recent art movements that require more active audience participation, but also by recognition that adequate appreciation of nature cannot be distanced. 5. Sensibility. Although culture plays a role, our appreciation of things is primarily perceptual, a matter of sensibility. It is by way of the senses that we engage with the world around us. 6. Partial Merging of the Aesthetic and the Ethical. Environmental aesthetics is closely tied with environmentalism. Berleant thinks that aesthetic value can be a sign of moral value and that aesthetical appreciation of nature can lead to respect for natural phenomena and a desire to treat them with respect. 7. Social and Political. Aesthetics may also be extended to the social and political domains. Berleant develops this idea in relation to the notion of "negative aesthetics." Although there is much to appreciate in our modern urban environments, for example, there is also much that we find disturbing. We need to think of there being a "perceptual commons" which is the ground of perceptual experience. Ultimately our need for such things as clean air, pleasant soundscapes, and appealing visual environment can be seen as the basis for a political perspective that replaces a society based on commercial interest and exploitation with one that is harmonious and sensitive to human need. The concept of "rights" is mythical and may be usefully replaced by the notion of that are immediate claims. 8. Taste. Taste is not universal but neither is it merely subjective. Aesthetic perception is never purely physical but is mediated by culture and context. Berleant seems to agree basically with Hume that beauty is not in the object but in the sentiment, and that competent critics form the standard of taste. Bourdieu's reduction of taste to cultural distinction goes too far. Although taste varies from culture to culture, comparative aesthetics may find commonalities as well as differences. Various disciplines supply a plethora of data on aesthetic experience and this should provide the basis for philosophical discussion of taste. Anyone who is interested in aesthetics would benefit from careful reading of this book. Librarians are strongly encouraged to purchase a copy.

Taking the view that aesthetics is a study grounded in perception, the essays in this volume exhibit many sides of the perceptual complex that is the aesthetic field and develop them in different ways. They reinvigorate our understanding of such arts as music and architecture; they range across the natural landscape to the urban one; they reassess the place of beauty in the modern environment and reassess the significance of the contributions to aesthetic theory of Kant and

Dewey; and they broach the kinds of meanings and larger understanding that aesthetic engagement with the human environment can offer. Written over the past decade, these original and innovative essays lead to a fresh encounter with the possibilities of aesthetic experience, one which has constantly evolved, moving in recent years in the direction of what Berleant terms 'social aesthetics', which enhances human-environmental integration and sociality.

'The informal style of Aesthetics beyond the Arts makes it enjoyable to read and its essays contain many rich descriptions on different types of environment ... The book should interest a wide range of readers. Not only those wanting a well-informed look at the main issues of environmental aesthetics, but readers who wish to get a glimpse on some of its emerging trends will find interesting reading in this book.' Kalle Puolakka, Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study/University of Helsinki 'Berleant's text does exactly as his title suggests: the cornucopian selection of essays traces his aesthetic thought from its origins in the arts, through the rise of environmental aesthetics, and to his current preoccupation with the ethical obligations of aesthetic theory. While the text does not break new ground for Berleant, a better introduction to his work would be difficult to find'. The British Journal of Aesthetics About the Author Arnold Berleant, Department of Philosophy, Long Island University, USA.