

PHIL 4403: Philosophy of Art

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5/2/05

Carlson, "Appreciation and the Natural Environment"

I.

*With artworks, it is straightforward both *what* and *how* we are aesthetically appreciating.

--In part, this is because artworks are "framed".

--Is Carlson correct when he claims:

"In knowing the type we know what and how to appreciate." (535)

--But, *what* and *how* do we aesthetically appreciate in nature? (The same answer doesn't carry over from artworks.)

II.

*Models of aesthetic appreciation:

Object model: "When we appreciate such sculpture we appreciate it as the actual physical object which it is." (536)

--So, the object is not seen as a representation. (This point is helpful when it comes to appreciating nature.)

--We can take this attitude toward nature as well: "we actually or contemplatively remove the object from its surroundings and dwell on its sensuous and design qualities and its possible expressive qualities." (536)

--Q: Should we accept this model and treat natural objects as "ready-mades"?

--Carlson complains that this is no longer an appreciation of *nature*, however (as it has been converted).

--What about removing the object, but not treating it as a ready-made? This still requires separating the object from its environment, and judging the setting the object is placed in to be aesthetically irrelevant. Carlson claims that there is an organic unity that suggests against such separation. (Q: But is this organic unity greater than in the case of artifacts?)

Scenery or landscape model: "...in landscape painting the appreciative emphasis is on those qualities which play an essential role in representing a prospect: visual qualities related to coloration and overall design." (537)

--So, we are to appreciate nature as if it were a landscape painting.

--Carlson's criticism:

"The model requires us to view the environment as if it were a static representation which is essentially "two dimensional." It requires the reduction of the environment to a scene or view. But what must be kept in mind is that the environment is not a scene, not a representation, not static, and not two dimensional." (538)

III.

*Carlson notes the extremely obvious: The natural environment is both an environment and natural.

--"An environment is the setting in which we exist as a "sentient part"; it is our surroundings." (539)

--So, it's that which we take for granted, and which goes unnoticed.

--Carlson's suggestion for aesthetic appreciation of nature:

"I suggest then that the beginning of an answer to the question of *how* to aesthetically appreciate an environment is something like the following: We must experience our background setting in all those ways in which we normally experience it, by sight, smell, touch, and whatever. However, we must experience it not as unobtrusive background, but as obtrusive foreground!" (539)

--But, we shouldn't aesthetically appreciate *all* of nature.

"For example, since we are aesthetically appreciating a certain kind of environment, the sound of the cicadas may be appreciated as a proper part of the setting, while the sound of the distant traffic is excluded much as we ignore the coughing in the concert hall." (540)

"Different natural environments require different acts of aspection; and as in the case of what to appreciate, our knowledge of the environment in question indicates how to appreciate, that is, indicates the appropriate act of aspection." (541)

--Carlson calls his model the *environmental model*.