Abstract
This chapter argues for the need for everyday aesthetics for pragmatic reasons by taking the environmental ramifications of our everyday aesthetic tastes and decisions as an example. We make aesthetic judgments, positive or negative, on natural creatures, landscapes, built environments, and consumer goods, which determine our attitude and subsequent actions regarding them. The consequences of such judgments and actions are often environmentally unsound, though we are seldom aware of them. In addition to raising consciousness about the environmental impact of our actions, our everyday aesthetics must be guided toward environmentally sound ends because of the power of our aesthetic judgments to influence, and sometimes determine, our actions. By reviewing an example of utilizing the power of the aesthetic toward a social agenda, such as 19th-century American landscape aesthetics promotion of national identity and pride, the specific tenets of green aesthetics, as well as strategies to avoid, are outlined.

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 (p.56) 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 Iwo-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.

(p.57) Those examples suggest that the ways in which aesthetics serves political, social, or commercial purposes have been more or less recognized and sometimes utilized. In contrast, we are less familiar with the power of the aesthetic to affect and sometimes determine the state of the world and the quality of life in ways that do not result from a specific program by the government, society, or commercial enterprise. One such example regards the environmental implications of everyday aesthetics.

Environmental ethics, a relatively new but by now firmly established discipline, today examines a wide range of issues: anthropocentrism, the tragedy of the commons mentality, environmental
racism, modern Western scientific attitude, rights of non-humans and future generations, to mention only a few. In discussing these issues, reference to aesthetics is typically made with respect to the aesthetic value of nature as pristine and wild, which is then cited as one of the reasons for its protection. This focus on wilderness aesthetics tends to cast any human intervention and creation in a negative light, as “abuse” of nature, an unfortunate consequence lamented by a number of recent critics. It also confines our environmentally relevant aesthetic life to a special experience with nature, a typical subject matter for noted nature writers, such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Barry Lopez, and Annie Dillard. This dominance of wilderness aesthetics in environmental discourse consequently eclipses the equally, or even more, crucial significance of our aesthetic reactions to our backyard as well as to everyday objects and activities, which generally do not provide memorable experiences or occasions for reflection. We thus tend to overlook their unexpectedly significant role in affecting, and sometimes determining, our ecological awareness, attitude, and ultimately actions, thus literally transforming the world. They appear trivial, innocent, and insignificant, when in fact they are not.

In this chapter I want to correct this general neglect of environmentally relevant everyday aesthetics. I will first show that our commonly held everyday aesthetic tastes and judgments regarding (1) natural creatures, (2) landscape, and (3) built environment and artifacts have often worked 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

i. 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 “heartwarming 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, newborn 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 (p. 60) attracted to certain creatures, we tend to care about their fate and are inclined to protect them, while we tend to remain indifferent toward 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 palila, a member of the honeycreeper family of birds indigenous to Hawaii, with striking 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, two- to three-inch member of the minnow family, which was threatened to extinction by the 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 numbers should be severely decreased in some areas.”

(p. 61) 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 (p.62) 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’ esthetic resources, namely the ‘foliage 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 in droves 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 underaged 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 subtlety of the bowns and grays of our everyday (p.63) 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 (p.64) 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 wonderlands that the American people have elevated into that glorious class.”

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. 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.”

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. 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 (p.65) by a touched up photo, as in the case of the Hetch Hetchy in Yosemite. Thus, our prevalent scenic landscape aesthetics has consequences not only regarding the fate of unsenic lands but also regarding our protection and management of scenic lands.
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, weed-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.” 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 off-white, “imperfect,” and coarse surface of recycled paper is considered inferior to pristine white, perfectly smooth paper with a glossy finish made (p.66) 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.”

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 single indispensable basis for landscape architecture and regional planning.” According to William McDonough (p.67) 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.” 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.”
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. 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.

These examples are evidence of what one writer claims is “the perceived incompatibility between aesthetics and wholesomeness” 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 (p.68) 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 Solenium 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 slick 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, (p.69) 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 (p.70) 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 land ethic and land aesthetic 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, 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 (p.71) 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.”

(p.72) 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 one 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.

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**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-scape 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 “eyesore 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 (p.98) 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 became 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.” As Postrel reminds us, “the test of time works both ways.”

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.” 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. Thayer calls these (p.99) “conspicuous nonconsumption” and regards them “essential markers along the road to a more sustainable world.” 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” 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 esthetics.” This challenge is particularly pertinent in the Capewind 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. 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 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. 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.

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 affective 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. 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. Citizens need to be enfranchised and the sense of empowerment will positively affect their aesthetic experience of the object and project.

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. 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, (p.102) 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 (p.103) like. They are also amenable to change with new scientific discovery. However, what I want to point out is that aesthetics does have a surprisingly important, if not decisive, role to play and our current neglect needs to be challenged and corrected.