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### 13. CONTEMPORARY AESTHETICS AND THE NEGLECT OF NATURAL BEAUTY

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OPEN an eighteenth-century work on aesthetics, and the odds are that it will contain a substantial treatment of the beautiful, the sublime, the picturesque in nature.<sup>1</sup> Its treatment of art may be secondary and derivative, not its primary concern. Although the nineteenth century could not be said to repeat these same emphases, they certainly reappear in some impressive places, in Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, for instance—a work that might have been entitled, no less accurately, 'How to look at nature and enjoy it aesthetically.' In our own day, however, writings on aesthetics attend almost exclusively to the arts and very rarely indeed to natural beauty, or only in the most perfunctory manner. Aesthetics is even *defined* by some mid-century writers as 'the philosophy of art', 'the philosophy of criticism', analysis of the language and concepts used in describing and appraising art-objects. Two much-quoted anthologies of aesthetics (Elton's in this country, Vivas and Krieger's in America) contain not a single study of natural beauty.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> By 'nature' I shall mean all objects that are not human artefacts. This will of course include living creatures. I can afford to ignore for the purposes of this study the many possible disputes over natural objects that have received a marked, though limited, transformation at man's hands.

<sup>2</sup> ELTON; VIVAS-KRIEGER. Compare also OSBORNE, which likewise confines its investigation to art-experience. BEARDSLEY is sub-titled *Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*.

Osborne defines beauty as the 'characteristic and peculiar excellence of works of

Why has this curious shift come about? For part of the answer we have to look not to philosophers' theories but to some general shifts in aesthetic taste itself. This is a legitimate procedure, since, despite the difference of logical level between them, judgements of taste and the theorizings of aesthetics exert unmistakable influences upon one another. Relevant facts, then, are these: that—for all the cult of the open air, the caravans, camps and excursions in the family car—serious aesthetic concern with nature is today rather a rare phenomenon. If we regard the Wordsworthian vision as the great peak in the recent history of the subject, then we have to say that the ground declined very sharply indeed from that extraordinary summit, and that today we survey it from far below. In one direction it quickly declined to the deeps of the romantics' own 'dejection' experiences, and in another to the forced ecstasies and hypocrisies of a fashionable and trivialized nature-cult. At its most deeply felt the Wordsworthian experience brought a rekindling of religious imagination for some who found it no longer sustained by the traditional dogmas. But a still more radical loss of religious confidence came to undermine the undogmatic Wordsworthian experience itself.

The vanishing of the sense that nature is man's 'educator', that its beauties communicate more or less specific morally ennobling messages, this is only one aspect of the general (and much anatomized) disappearance of a rationalist faith in nature's thoroughgoing intelligibility and in its ultimate endorsement of human visions and aspirations. The characteristic image of contemporary man, as we all know, is that of a 'stranger', encompassed by a nature, which is indifferent, unmeaning and 'absurd'.

The work of the sciences, too, has tended to increase bewilderment and loss of nerve over the aesthetic interpretation of nature. Microscope and telescope have added vastly to our perceptual data; the forms of the ordinary landscape, ordinarily interpreted, are shown up as only a selection from countless different scales.

It is not surprising that (with a few exceptions) the artists themselves have turned from imitation and representation to the sheer creation of new objects, rewarding to contemplate in their own right. If they are expressive of more than purely formal relation-

art'. Beardsley's opening sentence reads: 'There would be no problems of aesthetics, in the sense in which I propose to mark out this field of study, if no one ever talked about works of art.'

ships, then that 'more' tends to be not the alien external landscape but the inner landscape of the human psyche.

On the theoretical level, there are other and distinctive reasons for the neglect of natural beauty in aesthetics itself, especially in an aesthetics that seeks to make itself increasingly rigorous. One such reason is that if we are aiming at an entirely general account of aesthetic excellence, this account cannot make essential reference to experience of (or imitation of) nature; since there are arts like music which are devoid of any such reference. Some writers have been impressed by the fact that certain crucial features of aesthetic experience are quite unobtainable in nature—a landscape does not minutely control the spectator's response to it as does a successful work of art; it is an unframed ordinary object, in contrast to the framed, 'esoteric', 'illusory' or 'virtual' character of the art-object. And so the artefact is taken as the aesthetic object *par excellence*, and the proper focus of study.

Although it is now very much in eclipse, the last widely accepted unified aesthetic system was the expression theory. No single new system has taken its place; and some of its influences are still with us. The expression theory is a *communication-theory*: it must represent aesthetic experience of nature either as communication from the Author of Nature, which it rarely does, or else (rather awkwardly) as the discovery that nature's shapes and colours can with luck serve as expressive vehicles of human feeling, although never constructed for that end.<sup>3</sup> The theory most readily copes with artefacts, not natural objects; with successful interpersonal communication, not the contemplation of sheer entities *as* entities. Although some very recent aesthetic analyses provide instruments that could be used to redress the lopsidedness of these emphases, they have not yet been applied extensively to this task.<sup>4</sup>

We may note, finally, that linguistic or conceptual analysts have been understandably tempted to apply their techniques first and

<sup>3</sup> For Croce's view, see CROCE, Part I, Ch. 13.

<sup>4</sup> I am thinking, for example, of the recent insistence that even the art-object is primarily *object*, that it must not be approached simply as a clue to its creator's states of mind. See BEARDSLEY *passim*, especially the earlier sections. I discuss some aspects of this 'anti-intentionalism' later in this paper.

(It should be mentioned that Beardsley's book contains an exceptionally rich bibliography of recent English and American writing in aesthetics. A reader who follows up the references given in his notes and discussions (appended to each chapter of the book) is given a very full survey of current argument and opinion.)

foremost to the arguments, counter-arguments and manifestoes lying to hand in the writings of critics of the arts. In the case of natural beauty, however, such a polemical critical literature scarcely exists. The philosopher must first work out his own detailed and systematic account of the aesthetic enjoyment of nature. And this he has so far been slow, or reluctant, to do.

Having outlined the situation, the neglect of the study of natural beauty, I now want to argue that the neglect is a very bad thing: bad, because aesthetics is thereby steered off from examining an important and richly complex set of relevant data; and bad because when a set of human experiences is ignored in a theory relevant to them, they tend to be rendered less readily available as experiences. If we cannot find sensible-sounding language in which to describe them—language of a piece with the rest of our aesthetic talk, the experiences are felt, in an embarrassed way, as off-the-map; and, since off the map, seldom visited. This result is specially unfortunate, if for other reasons the experiences are already hard to achieve—in some of their varieties at least. What, then, can contemporary aesthetics say on the topic of natural beauty?

In a one-chapter study like this the whole problem (or tangle of problems) cannot be teased out minutely. There must be drastic selecting among possible themes. Bearing in mind the general aims of this book, I have tried in what follows to strike a reasonable compromise. On the one hand, the reader needs some surveying of the philosophical situation, some indicating of the main patterns of current argument and opinion; and on the other hand (knowing how much emphasis is put upon minute logical analysis in British philosophy), he must be provided with some samples of that—brief and tentative though they will have to be. This essay has begun with some very general remarks indeed: it will move gradually towards discussing more specific and limited issues, and its last topic of all will be its most highly particularized one. These various topics are not so intimately related as to be links in a single chain of argument. But the later discussions make frequent and essential reference back to points made earlier. I call this in one sense a compromise (in that neither the survey nor the analysis is more than a sketch); but in another sense it tries to exhibit what are always legitimate, indeed necessary, tasks for the writer on aesthetics. He is ill-advised to do *nothing but*

general surveying, or his work would be too loosely and remotely related to the particularities of actual aesthetic experiences. But a monomaniacal concern with analysis alone can be equally unfortunate. It may prevent even an intelligent choosing of cruces for the analysis itself, and make it impossible to see the bearing of the analyses upon the inquiry as a whole, far less upon the related fields of ethics and the philosophy of mind.

If I am right that systematic description is one main lack in the treatment of our subject, my first obligation may well be to supply some account of the varieties of aesthetic experience of nature. But their variety is immense, and mere cataloguing would be tedious. I shall suggest, therefore, two principles of selection that may throw together some samples interesting in themselves and useful for our subsequent arguments.

First, we have already remarked that art-objects have a number of general characteristics not shared by objects in nature. It would be useful if we could show (and I think we can) that the absence of certain of these features is not merely negative or privative in its effect, but can contribute positively and valuably to the aesthetic experience of nature. A good specimen is the degree to which the spectator can be involved in the natural aesthetic situation itself. On occasion, he may confront natural objects as a static, disengaged observer; but far more typically the objects envelop him on all sides. In a forest, trees surround him; he is ringed by hills, or he stands in the midst of a plain. If there is movement in the scene, the spectator may himself be in motion, and his motion may be an important element in his aesthetic experience. Think, for instance, of a glider-pilot, delighting in a sense of buoyancy, in the balancing of the air-currents that hold him aloft. This sort of involvement is well expressed by Barbara Hepworth:

What a different shape and 'being' one becomes lying on the sand with the sea almost above from when standing against the wind on a sheer high cliff with seabirds circling patterns below one.  
[HEPWORTH, Ch. 4]

We have not only a mutual involvement of spectator and object, but also a reflexive effect by which the spectator experiences *himself* in an unusual and vivid way; and this difference is not merely noted, but dwelt upon aesthetically. The effect is not unknown to

art, especially architecture. But it is both more intensely realized and pervasive in nature-experience—for we are *in* nature and a part *of* nature; we do not stand over against it as over against a painting on a wall.

If this study were on a larger scale, we should have to analyse in detail the various senses of 'detachment' and 'involvement' that are relevant here. This would prove a more slippery investigation than in the case of art-appreciation; but a rewarding one. Some sort of detachment there certainly is, in the sense that I am not *using* nature, manipulating it or calculating how to manipulate it. But I am both actor and spectator, ingredient in the landscape and lingering upon the sensations of being thus ingredient, rejoicing in their multifariousness, playing actively with nature, and letting nature, as it were, play with me and my sense of myself.

My second specimen is very similar, though, I think, worth listing separately. Though by no means all art-objects have frames or pedestals, they share a common character in being *set apart* from their environment, and set apart in a distinctive way. We might use the words 'frame' and 'framed' in an extended sense, to cover not only the physical boundaries of pictures but all the various devices employed in the different arts to prevent the art-object being mistaken for a natural object or for an artefact without aesthetic interest. Our list of frames, in this wide sense, would include the division between stage-area and audience-area in the theatre, the concert-convention that the only aesthetically relevant sounds are those made by the performers, the layout of a page in a book of poems, where typography and spacing set the poem apart from titles, page-numbers, critical apparatus and footnotes. Such devices are best thought of as aids to the recognition of the formal *completeness* of the art-objects themselves, their ability to sustain aesthetic interest, an interest that is not crucially dependent upon the relationships between the object and its general environment. Certainly, its environment may enhance or weaken its effect; and we may even see parts of the environment in a new way as a result of contemplating an art-object. But this does not affect the central point, that these works of art are first and foremost bounded objects, that their aesthetic characteristics are determined by their internal structure, the interplay of their elements.

In contrast, natural objects are 'frameless'. This is in some ways

a disadvantage aesthetically; but there are some remarkable compensating advantages. Whatever lies beyond the frame of an art-object cannot normally become part of the aesthetic experience relevant to it. A chance train-whistle cannot be integrated into the music of a string quartet; it merely interferes with its appreciation. But where there is no frame, and where nature is our aesthetic object, a sound or a visible intrusion from beyond the original boundaries of our attention can challenge us to integrate it in our overall experience, to modify that experience so as to make room for it. This, of course, *need* not occur; we may shut it out by effort of will, if it seems quite unassimilable. At any rate, our creativity is challenged, set a task; and when things go well with us, we experience a sudden expansion of imagination that can be memorable in its own right.

'And, when there came a pause  
Of silence such as baffled his best skill:  
Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung  
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise  
Has carried far into his heart the voice  
Of mountain-torrents'; Wordsworth: *There Was a Boy*

If the absence of 'frame' precludes full determinateness and stability in the natural aesthetic object, it at least offers in return such unpredictable perceptual surprises; and their mere possibility imparts to the contemplation of nature a sense of adventurous openness.<sup>5</sup>

Something more definite can be said on the determinate and indeterminate in this connection. In, say, a painting, the frame ensures that each element of the work is determined in its perceived qualities (including emotional qualities) by a limited and definite context. Colour modifies colour and form modifies form; yet the frame supplies a boundary to all relevant modifiers, and,

<sup>5</sup> Unrestricted generalizations in aesthetics are usually precarious in proportion to their attractiveness. I have taken care not to set out the above contrast between 'framed' and 'unframed' as a contrast between *all* art-objects and *all* natural objects considered aesthetically; for not every art-object has a frame, even in the extended sense I have used above. Works of architecture, for instance, are like natural objects, in that we can set no limits to the viewpoints from which they can properly be regarded, nor can we decree where the aesthetically relevant context of a building ends. A church or castle, seen from several miles away, may dominate, and determine how we see a whole landscape. The contrast between framed and frameless can none the less be made for very many types of aesthetic object—far enough at least to justify the general points made in the text.

thus, any given colour or shape can be seen in a successful painting, to have a determinate, contextually controlled character. Obviously, this is one kind of determinateness that cannot be achieved with natural objects; and that for several reasons. To consider only one of them: the aesthetic impact made upon us by, say, a tree, is part-determined by the context we include in our view of it. A tree growing on a steep hill-slope, bent far over by the winds, may strike us as tenacious, grim, strained. But from a greater distance, when the view includes numerous similar trees on the hillside, the striking thing may be a delightful, stippled, patterned slope, with quite different emotional quality—quixotic or cheery.<sup>6</sup> So with any aesthetic quality in nature; it is always provisional, correctible by reference to a different, perhaps wider context, or to a narrower one realized in greater detail. 'An idyllic scene? But you haven't noticed that advancing, though still distant, thundercloud. Now you have noticed it, and the whole scene takes on a new, threatened, ominous look.' In positive terms this provisional and elusive character of aesthetic qualities in nature creates a restlessness, an alertness, a search for ever new standpoints, and for more comprehensive gestalts. Of this restlessness and of this search I shall, very shortly, have more to say.

My last point on the present topic is this. We can distinguish, in a rough and ready way, between the particular aesthetic impact of an object, whether natural or artefact, and certain general 'background' experiences, that are common to a great many aesthetic situations and are of aesthetic value in themselves. With an art-object, there is the exhilarating activity of coming to grasp its intelligibility as a perceptual whole. We find built-in guides to interpretation, and contextual controls for our response. We are aware of these features as having been expressly put there by its creator. Now I think that we can locate a nearly parallel but interestingly different background experience when our object is not an artefact but a natural one. Again, it is a kind of exhilaration, in this case a delight in the fact that the forms of the natural world offer scope for the exercise of the imagination, that leaf pattern chimes with vein or pattern, cloud form with mountain form and mountain form with human form. On a theistic view this begets a distinctive sort of wonderment at the 'artistry' of God. On a naturalistic view it can beget at least no less wonderment at this

<sup>6</sup> On emotional qualities I have written elsewhere. [HEPBURN]

uncontrived adaptation. Indeed, when nature is pronounced to be 'beautiful'—not in the narrower sense of that word, which contrasts 'beautiful' with 'picturesque' or 'comic', but in the wide sense equivalent to 'aesthetically excellent'—an important part of our meaning is just this, that nature's forms do provide this scope for imaginative play. For that is surely not analytically true; it might have been otherwise.

I have been arguing that certain important differences between natural objects and art-objects should not be seen as entailing the aesthetic unimportance of the former, that (on the contrary) several of these differences furnish grounds for distinctive and valuable types of aesthetic experience of nature. These are types of experience that art cannot provide to the same extent as nature, and which in some cases it cannot provide at all.

Supposing that a person's aesthetic education fails to reckon with these differences, supposing it instils in him the attitudes, the tactics of approach, the expectations proper to the appreciation of art-works only, we may be sure that such a person will either pay very little aesthetic heed to natural objects, or else will heed them in the wrong way. He will look—and of course look in vain—for what can be found and enjoyed only in art. Furthermore, one cannot be at all certain that he will seriously ask himself whether there might be other tactics, other attitudes and expectations more proper and more fruitful for the aesthetic appreciation of nature. My sampling of these 'differences', therefore, is not a merely introductory exercise in distinction-making. It has the polemical purpose of showing that unless these distinctions are reckoned with both in aesthetic education and theorizing, one can neither intelligently pursue nor adequately comprehend experience of natural beauty, save only in its most rudimentary forms.

So much for the listing of neglects and omissions. I want now to turn to something more constructive, and to take as a starting-point certain recurrent and *prima facie* attractive ways in which natural beauty has in fact been attended to and described, both in the past and present. I say 'as a starting-point', because I do not plan to examine in detail specific philosophical theories that have incorporated them. Rather, we shall take note of those approaches, the characteristic vocabulary that goes with them, and inquire how far (if at all) they point to an aesthetic of natural beauty that could be viable today.

Accounts of natural beauty sometimes focus upon the contemplating of single natural objects in their individuality and uniqueness (for an example—Pepita Haezrahi's analysis of the aesthetic contemplation of a single falling leaf [HAEZRAHI, Ch. 2]. Other writers, with greater metaphysical daring—or rashness—speak of the enjoyment of natural beauty as tending towards an ideal of 'oneness with nature' or as leading to the disclosure of 'unity' in nature. The formulations vary greatly and substantially among themselves; but the vocabulary of unity, oneness as the key aesthetic principle, is the recurrent theme. (On this point see terminal Note, p. 308.)

There are strong influences in contemporary British philosophy that prompt one to have the fullest sympathy with a particularist approach to natural beauty—as the contemplation of individual objects with their aesthetically interesting perceptual qualities; and to have very little sympathy for the more grandiose, speculative and quasi-mystical language of 'oneness with or in nature'. Yet it seems to me that we do not have here one good and one bad aesthetic approach, the first sane and the second absurd. Rather, we have two poles or well-separated landmarks between which lies a range of aesthetic possibilities; and in the mapping of this range those landmarks will play a valuable, perhaps a necessary role.

We must begin by bluntly denying the universal need for unity, unity of form, quality, structure or of anything else. We can take aesthetic pleasure in sheer plurality, in the stars of the night sky, in a birdsong without beginning, middle or end.<sup>7</sup>

And yet to make unity, in some sense, one's key concept need not be simply wrong-headed or obscurantist. Nor do we have to say, rather limply, that there are two distinct and unrelated types of aesthetic excellence, one that contemplates individual uniqueness and the other—no better or worse—that aims at some grand synthesis. I want to argue that there are certain incompletenesses in the experience of the isolated particular, that produce a *nisus* towards the other pole, the pole of unity. Accuracy, however, will require us to deny that there is a single type of unification or union; there are several notions to be distinguished within the ideal, and the relations between them are quite complex.

One such direction of development we have already noted;

<sup>7</sup> Compare MONTEPIORE (2).

namely, the *nisus* towards more and more comprehensive or adequate survey of the context that determines the perceived qualities of a natural object or scene. Our motives are, in part, the desire for a certain integrity or 'truth' in our aesthetic experience of nature; and of this more shortly. In part also we are prompted by our awareness that in all aesthetic experience it is contextual complexity that, more than any other single factor, makes possible the minute discrimination of emotional qualities; and such discrimination is accorded high aesthetic value. It is largely the pursuit of such value that moves us to accept what I called 'the challenge to integrate'—to take notice of and to accept as aesthetically relevant some shape or sound that initially lies outside the limit of our attention. 'Challenge' was not, I think, an overdramatic word to use. For we can contrast the stereotyped experiences of the aesthetically apathetic and unadventurous person with the richly and subtly diversified experiences of the aesthetically courageous person. His courage consists in his refusal to heed only those features of a natural object or scene that most readily come together in a familiar pattern or which yield a comfortably generalized emotional quality. It also involves taking the repeated risk of drawing a blank, of finding oneself unable to hold the various elements together as a single object of contemplation, or to elicit any significant aesthetic experience from them at all.

The expansion of context may be a spatial expansion, but it does not have to be spatial. What else can it be? When we contemplate a natural object, we may see it not as sand-dune or rock but simply as a coloured shape. If this is difficult, we can look at the world upside down, with our head between our legs. But although an aesthetic view of an object will strive to shake free from conventional and deadening conceptualizings, that is not to say that *all* interpretings, all 'seeings as . . .' are lapses to the non-aesthetic. We ought not to accept a dichotomy of 'pure aesthetic contemplation'—'impure admixture of associations'. Suppose I am walking over a wide expanse of sand and mud. The quality of the scene is perhaps that of wild, glad emptiness. But suppose that I bring to bear upon the scene my knowledge that this is a tidal basin, the tide being out. The realization is not aesthetically irrelevant. I see myself now as virtually walking on what is for half the day sea-bed. The wild glad emptiness may be tempered by a disturbing weirdness.

This sort of experience can readily be related to the movement we were examining, the movement towards more complex and comprehensive synopses. In addition to spatial extension (or sometimes instead of it), we may aim at enriching the interpretative element, taking this not as theoretical 'knowledge about' the object or scene, but as helping to determine the aesthetic impact it makes upon us. 'Unity' here plays a purely 'regulative' role. Nature is not a 'given whole', nor indeed is knowledge about it. But in any case, there are practical, psychological limits to the expansion process; a degree of complexity is reached, beyond which there will be no increase in discrimination of perceptual or emotional qualities: rather the reverse.

A second movement away from contemplation of uninterpreted particulars is sometimes known as the 'humanizing' or the 'spiritualizing' of nature. I shall merely note its existence and relevance here, for there have been a good many accounts of it in the history of aesthetics. Coleridge said that 'Art is . . . the power of humanizing nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into every thing which is the object of his contemplation' [COLERIDGE, Vol. II]. And Hegel, that the aim of art is 'to strip the outer world of its stubborn foreignness' [HEGEL, Introduction]. What is here said about art is no less true of aesthetic experience of nature itself. Imaginative activity is working for a *rapprochement* between the spectator and his aesthetic object: unity is again a regulative notion, a symbol of the unattainable complete transmutation of brute external nature into a mirror of the mind.

By developing and qualifying the 'humanization' ideal we can come to see yet a third aspect of the *nisus* towards unity. A person who contemplates natural objects aesthetically may sometimes find that their emotional quality is describable in the vocabulary of ordinary human moods and feelings—melancholy, exuberance, placidity. In many cases, however, he will find that they are not at all accurately describable in such terms. A particular emotional quality can be roughly *analogous* to some nameable human emotion, desolation for instance; but the precise quality of desolation revealed in some waste or desert in nature may be quite distinctive in timbre and intensity. To put this another way: one may go to nature to find shapes and sounds that can be taken as the embodiment of human emotion, and in so far as this occurs, nature is felt to be humanized. But instead of nature being humanized, the

reverse may happen. Aesthetic experience of nature may be experience of a range of emotion that the human scene, by itself, untutored and unsupplemented, could not evoke. To extend the scope of these remarks, recall once again our quotation from Barbara Hepworth (p. 8). To be 'one' with nature in that sense was to realize vividly one's place in the landscape, as a form among its forms. And this is not to have nature's 'foreignness' or otherness overcome, but in contrast, to allow that otherness free play in the modifying of one's everyday sense of one's own being.

In this domain, again, we need not confine ourselves to the contemplating of naked, uninterpreted particulars. In a leaf-pattern I may 'see' also blood-vessel patterns, or the patterns of branching, forked lightning: or all of these. In a spiral nebula pattern I may see the pattern of swirling waters or whirling dust. I may be aware of a network of affinities, of analogous forms, that spans the inorganic or the organic world, or both. My experience has a quality of *multum in parvo*.<sup>8</sup> This is not necessarily a 'humanizing' of nature; it may be more like a 'naturizing' of the human observer. If, with Mr Eliot, one sees 'The dance along the artery/The circulation of the lymph' as 'figured in the drift of stars', something of the aesthetic qualities of the latter (as we perceive them) may come to be transferred to the former. Supposing that by this kind of aesthetic experience nature is felt to lose some of its 'foreignness', that may be because we have ourselves become foreign to our everyday, unexamined notion of ourselves, and not through any assimilation of nature's forms to pre-existent notions, images or perceptions.

A fourth class of approaches to the ideals of 'unity' is itself rather heterogeneous; but we can characterize its members as follows. They are, once again, concerned less with the specific content of particular aesthetic experiences than with what we have called the 'background' quality of emotions and attitudes, common to a great many individual experiences. In their case the background is a sense of reconciliation, suspension of conflict, and of being in that sense at one with the aesthetic object. This particular sort of 'at-one-ness' could hardly be present in art-experience, since it requires that the aesthetic object should be at the same time the natural environment or some part of it. This is the same environment from which we wrest our food, from which

<sup>8</sup> See *KEPUS passim*, on such analogies and affinities among natural forms.

we have to protect ourselves in order to live, which refuses to sustain our individual lives beyond a limited term, and to which we are finally 'united' in a manner far different from those envisaged in the aesthetic ideals of 'unity': 'Rolled round in earth's diurnal course With rocks and stones and trees.' To attain, and sustain, the relevant detachment from such an environment in order to savour it aesthetically is in itself a fair achievement, an achievement which suffuses the aesthetic experiences themselves with that sense of reconciliation. A cease-fire has been negotiated in our struggle with nature.

There is immense variety in the ways in which this can manifest itself in individual experience. The objects of nature may look to us as if their *raison d'être* were precisely that we should celebrate their beauty. As Rilke put it: 'Everything beckons to us to perceive it.' Or, the dominant stance may be that of benediction: the Ancient Mariner 'blesses' the watersnakes at his moment of reconciliation.

The fourth type of unity-ideal is notably different from our first three specimens. The first three quest after unity in the particular aesthetic perception itself: the attainment of complex unified synopses, the grasping of webs of affinities and so on. The fourth, however, could arise in the contemplation of what is itself quite *un*-unified in the above senses, the night sky again, or a mass of hills with no detectable pattern to unite them. It is more strictly a concomitant, or a by-product of an aesthetic experience that we are already enjoying, an experience in which there may have been no synoptic grasping of patterns, relating of forms or any other sort of unifying.

I suspect that someone who tried to construct a comprehensive aesthetic theory with 'unity' as its sole key concept would obtain his comprehensiveness only by equivocating or punning over the meaning of the key expression, only by sliding and slithering from one of its many senses to another. When one sense is not applicable, another may well be. The fourth sense in particular can be relevant to vivid aesthetic experience of any natural object or collection of objects whatever.

So much the worse, we may conclude, for such a theory *qua* monolithic. But to say that is not to imply that our study has yielded only negative results. This is only one of several areas in aesthetics where we have to resist the temptation to work with a single supreme concept and must replace it by a *cluster* of related

key concepts. Yet, in searching out the relevant key-concepts, the displaced pseudo-concept may yet be a useful guide—as it is in the present case. We should be ill-advised, however, to take this cluster of unity-concepts as by itself adequate for all explanatory purposes. Our analysis started with the stark contemplation of the uninterpreted, unrelated natural object in all its particularity and individual distinctness. This was not a mere starting-point, to be left behind in our pursuit of the 'unities'. On the contrary, aesthetic experience remains tethered to that concern with the particular, even if on a long rope. The rope is there, although the development and vitality of that experience demand that it be stretched to the full. The pull of the rope is felt, when the expanding and complicating of our synopses reaches the point beyond which we shall have not more but less fine discrimination of perceptual quality. It is felt again, when we risk the blurring and negating of natural forms as we really perceive them, in an anxious attempt to limit our experience of nature to the savouring of stereotyped and well-domesticated emotional qualities. It is even relevant to our fourth type of unity-ideal: for the sense of reconciliation is not an independent and autonomous aesthetic experience, but hangs entirely upon the occurrence of particular experiences of particular aesthetically interesting natural objects.

Up to this point my aim has been chiefly to describe some varieties of aesthetic experience of nature. From these we may make the following inferences. (i) Although some important features of art-experience are unattainable in nature, that by no means entitles the aesthetician to confine his studies to art; for even these points of apparent privation can yield types of aesthetic experience that are well worth analysis. (ii) Accounts of natural beauty that take 'unity' as their central concept are often metaphysically extravagant, and are chronically unperceptive of ambiguities in their claims. Nevertheless, a cautious aesthetician would be unwise to let this extravagance deflect him from patiently teasing out the numerous and important strands of experience that originally prompted these accounts.

I turn now to a second main topic. Although recent aesthetics has been little concerned with natural beauty as such, yet in the course of its analysis of *art*-experience, it has frequently made comparisons between our aesthetic approach to art-objects and to



objects in nature. It has made these comparisons at crucial points in argument, and in several different sorts of context. But what has not been asked—or adequately answered—is whether the comparing has been fairly done; whether, in particular, the account of nature-experience, given or presupposed, is an adequate or a distorted account. Our discussion of some 'varieties' may have furnished us with useful data.

A substantial part of recent aesthetics has been the criticism of the expression theory of art. Right at the centre of this criticism is the denial that we need concern ourselves with discovering the intention or the actual feelings or intuitions of the artist, when we try to appreciate or to appraise his artefact. The expression theory saw the artefact as the middle link in a communication from artist to spectator; the critics of the theory see the artefact first and foremost as an object with certain properties, properties which are, or should be, aesthetically interesting, worth contemplating, and which in their totality control and guide the spectator's response. This change of emphasis chimes in well with the desire for a 'scientific' criticism (the properties are *there* in the artefact, the object), and with the anti-psychologicist mood of current British and American philosophy (the work of art is not an 'imaginary' one: and we are not probing behind it to its creator's states of soul).

Clearly this is an aesthetic approach that reduces the gulf between art-object and natural object. Both are to be approached primarily as individual, self-contained entities, exciting to contemplate by virtue of the objective properties they can be seen to possess.<sup>9</sup> But, let us ask, how far can we accept this comparison? Critics of the critics have pointed out some deficiencies. They have insisted, for instance, upon the irreducible relevance of linguistic, social and cultural context to the interpretation of a poem. The identical words might constitute *two* poems, not one, if we read them in two different contexts.<sup>10</sup> We could extend this criticism

<sup>9</sup> This account is highly general and schematic. I have said nothing about the basic differences among the arts themselves, which make the 'aesthetic object' in (say) music so unlike that in literature or that again in architecture. My account as it stands is most immediately relevant to the visual arts, especially sculpture; but what is said about overall trends and emphases has extension beyond those.

<sup>10</sup> H. S. Eveling argues [EVELING] that we should have a clash of competing criteria in such a situation. We should want to say 'same words, same poem': but, knowing how differently we shall interpret the words, according to the context in which we read them, we also want to say, 'one set of words but two poems'.

as follows. Suppose we have two perceptually identical objects, one an artefact and the other natural. They might be a 'carved stone' of Arp and a naturally smoothed stone; a carving in wood and a piece of fallen timber. Or they might be identical in pattern, though not in material; for example, a rock face with a particular texture and markings, and an abstract expressionist painting with the same texture and the same markings. If we made the most of the *rapprochement*, we should have to say that we had in each of these cases essentially *one* aesthetic object. (Although numerically two, the pair would be no more aesthetically different from one another than two engravings from the same block.) Yet this would be a misleading conclusion. If we knew them for what they are—as artefact or natural object—we should certainly attend differently to them, and respond differently to them. As we look at the rock face in nature, we may realize imaginatively the geological pressures and turmoils that produced its pattern. The realizing of these need not be a piece of extra-aesthetic reflection: it may determine for us how we see and respond to the object itself. If we interpreted and responded to the abstract painting in the same way (assuming, of course, that it is a thoroughgoing abstract and not the representation of a rock face!), our interpretation would this time be merely whimsical, no more controlled or stabilised than a seeing of faces in the fire.<sup>11</sup> If we arbitrarily restricted aesthetic experience both of nature and art to the contemplating of uninterpreted shapes and patterns, we could, of course, have the *rapprochement*. But we have seen good reason for refusing so to restrict it in the case of nature-experience, whatever be the case with art.

Take another example. Through the eye-piece of a telescope I see the spiral nebula in Andromeda. I look next at an abstract painting in a circular frame that contains the identical visual pattern. My responses are not alike, even if each is indisputably aesthetic. My awareness that the first shapes are of enormous and remote masses of matter in motion imparts to my response a strangeness and solemnity that are not generated by the pattern

<sup>11</sup> It is a weakness of some abstract painting that it sacrifices almost all the devices by which the spectator's response can be controlled and given determinateness. In the case of natural objects one is free to rely upon 'controls' external to the object—as in the present example. But even if the artist makes his artefacts very like natural objects, our knowledge that they are in fact artificial and 'framed' prevents us relying, in their case, upon such external controls.

alone. The abstract pattern may indeed impress by reminding me of various wheeling and swirling patterns in nature. But there is a difference between taking the pattern as that sort of reminder, and, on the other hand, brooding on this impressive instantiation of it in the nebula. Furthermore, a point already made about the emotive 'background' to aesthetic experience is relevant here again. Where we confront what we know to be a human artefact—say a painting—we have no special shock of surprise at the mere discovery that there are patterns here which delight perception; we know that they have been put there, though certainly we may be astonished at their particular aesthetic excellences. With a natural object, however, such surprise can figure importantly in our overall response, a surprise that is probably the greater the more remote the object from our everyday environment.

A more lighthearted but helpful way of bringing out these points is to suppose ourselves confronted by a small object, which, for all we know, may be natural or may be an artefact. We are set the task of regarding it aesthetically. I suppose that we might cast upon it an uneasy and embarrassed eye. How shall we approach it? Shall we, for instance, see in its smoothness the slow mindless grinding of centuries of tides, or the swifter and mindful operations of the sculptor's tools? Certainly, we can enjoy something of its purely formal qualities on either reckoning; but even the savouring of these is affected by non-formal factors that diverge according to the judgement we make about its origin.

To sum up this argument. On the rebound from a view of art as expression, as language, and the work of art as the medium of communication between artist and spectator, some recent aesthetics has been urging that the artefact is, first and foremost, an object among objects. The study of art is primarily the study of such objects, their observable qualities, their organization. This swing from intention to object has been healthful on the whole, delivering aesthetics and criticism from a great deal of misdirected labour. But it has countered the paradoxes of expressionism with paradoxes, or illuminating exaggerations, of its own. Differences between object and object need to be reaffirmed: indiscernibly different poems or carvings become discernibly different when we reckon with their aesthetically relevant cultural contexts; and the

contextual controls that determine how we contemplate an object in nature are different from those that shape our experience of art. In other words, we have here a central current issue in aesthetics that cannot be properly tackled without a full-scale discussion of natural beauty.

That, however, is not the only current issue about which the same can be said. It can be said also (and this introduces our final topic) about the analysis of such expressions as 'true', 'false', 'profound', 'shallow', 'superficial', as terms of aesthetic appraisal. These have been studied in their application to art-objects, but scarcely at all in connection with nature.<sup>12</sup> It might indeed be contested whether they have *any* meaningful use in the latter connection. I should readily admit that ordinary language can give very little help here; but I am equally sure that a use or uses can be *given* to these expressions in that context, and that such uses would be closely related to the more familiar uses in talk about art. But would this not constitute a merely arbitrary and pointless extension of a vocabulary useful only in art-criticism? Not really: it would rather be to give comprehensiveness to a set of discriminations important throughout aesthetic experience, but which has tended, for various understandable reasons, to be worked out in detail only with respect to art.

Where then, in the aesthetic experience of nature, is there any room for talking of 'truth', 'depth', 'triviality'? We can best approach an answer by way of some analysis of an expression which we have used once or twice already but not explained. It is a sense of the word 'realize'. Here are some examples of the use. 'I had long *known* that the earth was not flat, but I had never before *realized* its curvature till I watched that ship disappear on the horizon.' 'I had seen from the map that this was a deserted moor, but not till I stood in the middle of it did I realize its desolation.' Here 'realize' involves making, or becoming, vivid to perception, or to the imagination. If I suddenly realize the height of a cumulonimbus cloud I am not simply *taking note* of the height, but imagining myself climbing into the cloud in an aeroplane or falling through it, or I am superimposing upon it an image of a mountain of known vastness, or . . . or . . . Auxiliary imagings may likewise attend my realizing of the earth's curvature, the image of my arms

<sup>12</sup> On art, see HOSPERS.

stretched out, fingers reaching round the sphere; and the realization of loneliness may involve imagining myself shouting but being unheard, needing help but getting none. In some senses, to realize something is simply to 'know' or 'understand', where 'know' and 'understand' are analysable in dispositional terms. But our present sense of 'realize' has an essential episodic component: it is a coming-to-be-aware, a 'clock-able' experience. In the aesthetic setting that interests us, it is an experience accompanying and arising out of perceptions—perceptions upon which we dwell and linger: I am gazing at the cumulo-nimbus cloud, when I realize its height. We do not discard, or pass beyond, the experience, as if we were judging the height of the cloud in flight-navigation, or the loneliness of the moor in planning a murder. Realizing, in our sense, is not estimating or calculating. When I am told that the moon is a solid spherical body, 200,000 miles from the earth, I may go outside and look up at it and try, in the aesthetically relevant sense, to realize its solidity and its distance. Reference to perception can again be made obvious. We could not seriously ask ourselves 'Am I, in fact, accurately realizing its distance at 200,000 miles, or am I mistakenly imagining it as 190,000?' Such discriminations cannot be made perceptually: they can only be calculated.

Though we have no room to multiply examples, it should be obvious that this sort of realizing is one of our chief activities in the aesthetic experiencing of nature. It has been central in earlier illustrations, the contemplation of the rock face, the spiral nebula, the ocean-smoothed stone.

But my suggestion that realizing is 'episodic', occurrent, may properly be challenged. Suppose that I am realizing the utter loneliness of the moor, when suddenly I discover that behind sundry bits of cover are a great many soldiers taking part in a field-exercise. Could I, without illogic, maintain that I had been realizing what was not in fact the case? Hardly. 'Realize' contains a built-in reference to truth. It may have episodic components, but it cannot be exhaustively analysed in that way. I cannot be said to have realized the strength and hardness of a tall tree-trunk, if, when I then approach it, it crumbles rotten at a touch. But surely I was doing *something*: my experience did occur; and nothing that subsequently occurs can alter it.

Now, this experience was, of course, the aesthetic contempla-

tion of apparent properties. That they turn out not to be also actual properties may disturb the spectator, or it may not. For some people aesthetic experience is interested not at all in actuality—only in looks, seemings: indifference to truth may be part of their definition of the aesthetic. If the soldiers appear or the tree crumbles, the aesthetic value of the prior experiences is (to those people) not in the least affected.

But it is possible to take a rather different view. One could agree that a large range of aesthetic experience is not concerned about truth; but yet attach a peculiar importance to the range that is. I am not sure that the gulf between this and the contrasted view is wholly bridgeable by argument; but some reflections can be offered along the following lines.

If we want our aesthetic experiences to be repeatable and to have stability, we shall try to ensure that new information or subsequent experimentation will not reveal the 'seemings' as illusions, will not make a mock, as it were, of our first experience. If I know that the tree is rotten, I shall not be able again to savour its seeming-strength. I could, no doubt, savour its 'deceptively strong appearance'; but that would be a quite different experience from the first, and one that accepted and integrated the truth about the tree's actual rottenness.

Suppose the outline of our cumulo-nimbus cloud resembles that of a basket of washing, and we amuse ourselves in dwelling upon this resemblance. Suppose that on another occasion we dwell, not upon such freakish (or in Coleridge's sense 'fanciful') aspects, but try instead to realize the inner turbulence of the cloud, the winds sweeping up within and around it, determining its structure and visible form. Should we not be ready to say that this latter experience was less superficial or contrived than the other, that it was truer to nature, and for that reason more worth having? Or, compare again the realizing of the pressures, thrustings and great age of the rock before us, with merely chuckling over the likeness of its markings to a funny face. If there can be a passage, in art, from easy beauty to difficult and more serious beauty, there can also be such passage in aesthetic contemplation of nature.

If there were not a strong *nisus* in that direction, how could we account for the sense of bewilderment people express over how to bring their aesthetic view of nature into accord with the discoveries of recent science? Because of these discoveries (as Sir

Kenneth Clark puts it), 'the snug, sensible nature which we can see with our own eyes has ceased to satisfy our imaginations.'<sup>13</sup>

If the aesthetic enjoyment of nature were no more than the contemplation of particular shapes and colours and movements, these discoveries could not possibly disturb it. But they do: they set the imagination a task in 'realizing'.

An objector may still insist that reference to truth (whether in nature or art) is aesthetically irrelevant. To him the only relevant factors are the savouring of perceptual qualities and formal organization. Can anything be said in reply to his claim? The formalist might at least be reminded that a major element in his own enjoyment is the synoptic grasping of complexities. A particular colour-patch may be seen as part of an object, as modifying the colour of adjacent patches, and as contributing to the total perceived pattern—all simultaneously. One could argue that reference to truth—the striving to 'realize'—should be taken as adding one more level of complexity, a further challenge to our powers of synopsis, and that for the *exclusion* of it no good reason could be given.

But a more searching anxiety might be expressed, in these terms. Sometimes, indeed, such realizations may enhance an aesthetic experience, but may they not on other occasions destroy it? If, for example, you see the full moon rising behind the silhouetted branches of winter trees, you may judge that the scene is more beautiful if you think of the moon simply as a silvery flat disc at no great distance from the trees on the skyline. Why should you have your enjoyment spoiled by someone who tells you that you ought to be realizing the moon's actual shape, size and distance? Why indeed? There may be cases where I have to choose between, on the one hand, an aesthetic experience available only if I inhibit my realizing, and, on the other hand, a different aesthetic experience, available if I do some realizing. In our example, the first experience is of beauty (in the narrow sense), and we could not count on the alternative experience being also one of beauty, in the same sense. It might, of course, be still aesthetically exciting, that is, of beauty in the wider sense, the commoner sense in aesthetics. But, the objector might still press, there is no guaran-

<sup>13</sup> CLARK, p. 130. Sir Kenneth Clark is writing of art and artists, but his points are no less relevant to a contemplation of nature that never passes into the constructing of art-objects.

teeing even this latter possibility for *all* cases where we attempt to realize the nature of the objects contemplated. And this is exactly the difficulty we feel with regard to the bearing of present-day science on our vision of the natural world. Sometimes our attempts at realizing fail altogether, as with some versions of cosmologies and cosmogonies; or if they do succeed, they may be aesthetically bleak and unrewarding. Compromises, the balancing of one aesthetic requirement against another, are frequent enough, and may well be inevitable. One may say in a particular case—'This is the nearest I can come to making imaginatively vivid what I know about that object. My realizing is still not quite adequate to my knowledge; but if I were to go any farther in that direction I should lose touch altogether with the sights, sounds and movements of the visible world, seen from the human point of view. And that would impoverish, not enrich my total aesthetic experience.' What we should be feeling, (need I say?), is the tug of that rope—the rope that tethers aesthetic experience to the perception of the particular object and its perceived individuality.

To be able to say anything more confident about this problem, one would need to hold a metaphysical and religious view of nature and science, which denied that the imaginative assimilating of scientific knowledge could ultimately lead to aesthetic impoverishment. Probably Christian theism is one such view; and Goethe's philosophy of nature seems to have been another. These possibilities we can only take note of in this essay, without being able to explore them.

We may recall at the same time, and in conclusion, that the 'unitary' accounts of natural beauty have, historically, been closely allied with various sorts of pantheism and nature-mysticism. I have argued that there are, in fact, not one but several unity-ideals; that it is most unlikely that any single aesthetic experience can fully and simultaneously realize them all; and I believe that with certain of them the notion of full realization makes dubious sense. Nevertheless, it does not follow that the idea of their ever more intense and comprehensive realization is without value, nor that the link with nature-mystical experiences must be severed.<sup>14</sup>

Although I can only hazard this suggestion in the most tentative way, I suspect that no more materials are required than those with which we are already furnished, in order to render available

<sup>14</sup> See HOUGH, p. 174 *seq.*

certain limited varieties of mystical experience, and logically to map them. Those materials provide us, not with affirmations about a transcendent being or realm but with a *focus imaginarius*, that can play a regulative and practical role in the aesthetic contemplation of nature. It sees that contemplation as grounded, first and last, in particular perceptions, but as reaching out so as to relate the forms of the objects perceived to the pervasive and basic forms of nature; relating it also to the observer's own stance and setting, as himself one item in nature—a nature with whose forces he feels in harmony through the very success of this contemplative activity itself.

But even if something of the intensity and momentousness of mystical experience can be reached along such lines, this would be—for all I have said or shall say—a mysticism without a God. And surely the absence of belief in transcendence would make this quite different from a mysticism that admits it and centres upon it. Different, indeed, in the quality of available experience and in expectations aroused both for the here-and-now and the here-after; but not so radically different as to make 'mysticism' a misnomer for the former. Belief in a transcendent being means that, for the believer, the 'focus' is not imaginary but actual—in God; and it is doubtless psychologically easier to work towards a goal one believes to be fully realizable than towards a focus one believes, or suspects, to be imaginary. Rather similarly, in ethics a student may exercise a check to his practical moral confidence, when he discovers that 'oughts' cannot be grounded in 'is's'. Yet it is seldom that he indulges for this reason in a permanent moral sulk. Perhaps, if I am right, it is no more reasonable to indulge gratuitously in a nature-mystical sulk. But I begin to moralize: a sign that this paper has come to its proper end.

## NOTE TO PAGE 294

(a) Graham Hough's *Image and Experience* (1960) contains some suggestive reflections stemming from his discussion of Ruskin and Roger Fry.

By intense contemplation of . . . experiences of form and space we become conscious of the unity between ourselves and the natural world. [HOUGH, p. 175]

It is Ruskin's special distinction to show . . . how the experience of the senses can lead directly to that unified apprehension of nature, and of ourselves as a part of nature, which can fairly constantly be

recognized, under various mythological disguises, not only as that which gives value to aesthetic experience but also as one of the major consolations of philosophy. [HOUGH, p. 176]

(b) We have quoted (p. 289) Barbara Hepworth on the mutual involvement of the spectator and natural aesthetic object, the changes in the sense of one's own being, according to one's position in the landscape. She goes on, in the same autobiographical sketch, to call this a 'transmutation of essential unity with land and seascape, which derives from all the sensibilities . . .'

(c) The nature-mystical interpretation of the experience of unity-with-nature is briefly stated by Evelyn Underhill in her *Mysticism*. In moments of intense love for the natural world, 'hints of a marvellous truth, a unity whose note is ineffable peace, shine in created things' [UNDERHILL, p. 87].

W. T. Stace, listing the common characteristics of 'extrovertive mysticism' (to which nature-mysticism belongs), includes the following. 'The One is . . . perceived through the physical senses, in or through the multiplicity of objects.' Also: 'The One is apprehended more concretely as being an inner subjectivity in all things, described variously as life, or consciousness, or a living Presence.' He adds: 'There are underground connections between the mystical and the aesthetic . . . which are at present obscure and unexplained' [STACE, pp. 79, 81].

(d) On Coleridge, see WILLEY, Ch. 1 generally, especially Sects. III and IV. Coleridge wrote:

The groundwork . . . of all true philosophy is the full apprehension of the difference between the contemplation of reason, namely that intuition of things which arises when we possess ourselves as one with the whole . . . and that which presents itself when . . . we think of ourselves as separated beings, and place nature in antithesis to the mind, as object to subject, thing to thought, death to life. [*The Friend*, Bohn Ed., p. 366; quoted WILLEY, pp. 29 f.]

Coleridge's statement has, of course, a much wider application than the topic of natural beauty; but he certainly applied it there.

(e) See also Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Bk. VI, lines 624-40, and *Tintern Abbey*, lines 88-102.

If this were primarily a historical study, we should have had to trace systematically the development of those conceptions (nature—mystical, Platonic, romantic, etc., etc.) that are behind the vocabulary of 'unity with nature'. What we are asking here, however, is how far

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these ideas could be of help to someone trying to make sense of natural aesthetic experience at the present time. Thus these brief quotations and references, culled from a fairly wide field, may suffice to show at least the existence of the tendencies with which we shall be chiefly concerned.